

Church of England. Book of  
"common prayer."

# *The Christian Year*

THE PRAYER BOOK COLLECTS,  
WITH EPISTLES AND GOSPELS  
AS TRANSLATED BY J. B. PHILLIPS  
TOGETHER WITH NOTES BY  
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The Macmillan Company, New York

*cum privilegio*

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*The Christian Year*





## Foreword

EVERY newly-confirmed member of the Anglican Church is recommended to make some preparation of the mind and spirit before attending Holy Communion, and there are a few excellent books which are used for this purpose.

*The Christian Year* may be used as a supplement to any such manual of preparation, or it may be used simply by itself; and it may thus prove especially valuable to those busy people whose time for preparation is short. It is hoped that it will add illumination and understanding to any Communicant who loves the beauty of the Service, but cannot honestly say that the average Collect, Epistle and Gospel convey to him very much information or inspiration. The compilers of the *Book of Common Prayer* considered the ministry of the Word of God to be a proper part of Holy Communion. In their wisdom they selected, or composed, Collects for every Sunday and Holy-day in the Church's year. They joined to these Collects carefully chosen portions of Scripture. Unhappily their plan is sometimes hidden from us by archaism of language and the message of the Word itself obscured by the familiar beauty of language that is three hundred years old.

In this book Canon Dobson has used short but highly illuminating notes which will give us back the original force of this part of the Communion Service. If the notes are read through quietly before the Service begins, I believe that such a help to the intelligent worship of God will quickly become apparent.

J. B. PHILLIPS



I am deeply grateful to The Reverend J. B. Phillips for readily making available for this work translations from *The New Testament in Modern English*, including suggestions for new crossheadings, and also for preparing new translations of the seven Old Testament passages used for the Epistles during the course of the Christian Year. But for this assistance the notes would need to have been greatly extended.

H.W.D.







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## Introduction

THE first Prayer Book in English was published in the reign of King Edward VI (actually on March 7th, 1549), and was a first-fruit of the Reformation. Previous to this there had been many separate books, almost all in Latin, and all founded on the centuries-old Roman rite—the *Missal* for the Mass or Holy Communion; the *Breviary* containing the daily services with psalms, hymns and lessons; the *Pontifical*—everything used by a bishop; and the *Manual*—all the occasional services used in a parish church. There were also many local “uses”, like those of York and Hereford, but by far the most common was that of Sarum (Salisbury); and in the making of the *English Prayer Book* of 1549 the Sarum books were largely followed, especially in the Collects and in the choice of scripture for Epistles and Gospels.

Looking farther back, it is clear that many of the Collects (in their original Latin form) were already firm favourites in the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries. They were gathered together into service books (known as *Sacramentaries*) by Gelasius (492) and Gregory (590), both of whom were Bishops of Rome.

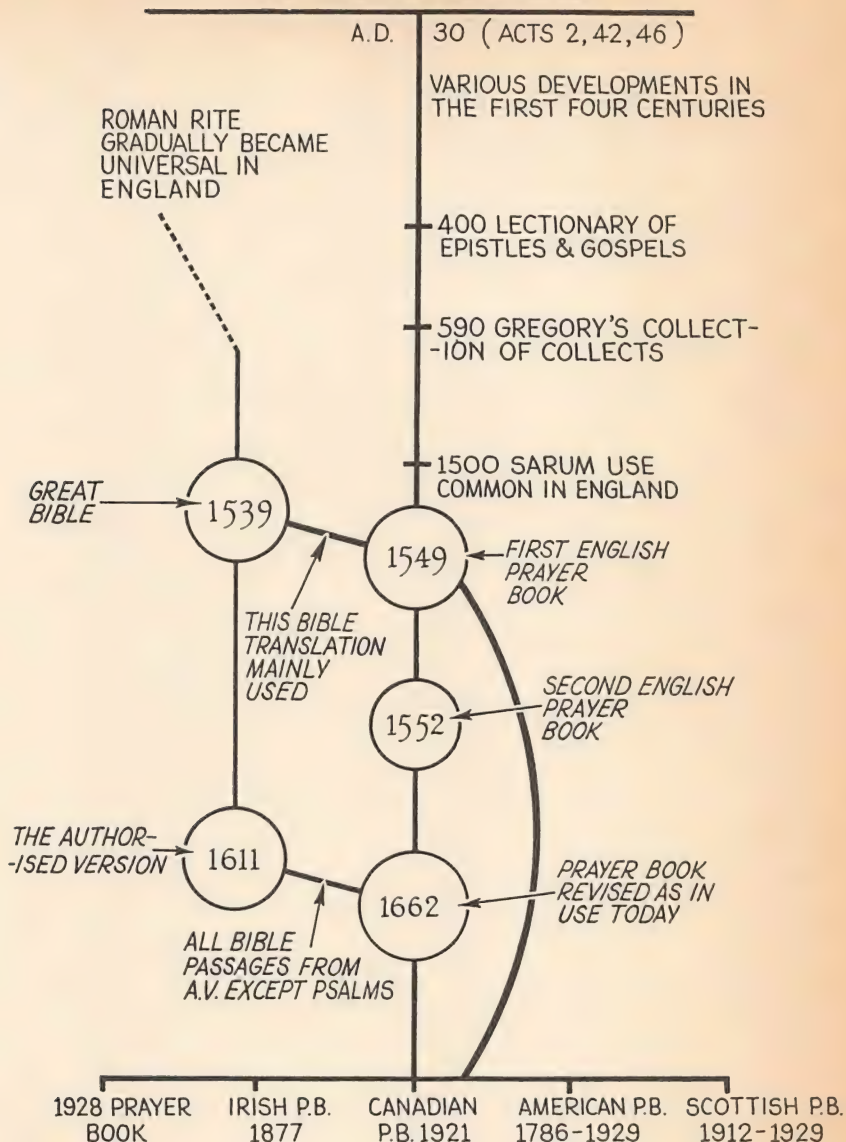
Earlier still, in the time of Jerome (c. 400), there existed a collection of Epistles and Gospels for all the Sundays of the year and most of the Festivals and Holy Days, and the Sarum “use” and our *English Prayer Book* follows this ancient collection closely. For instance, the Epistles and Gospels for the twenty-five Sundays after Trinity are practically identical in all three, and thus have been in continuous use in Eucharistic worship for at least fifteen hundred years.

But the Reformers did not hesitate to make changes and modifications where they saw these to be needed, and in addition to making some changes in the Epistles and Gospels, they provided completely new Collects for the first two Sundays in Advent, Christmas Day, Quinquagesima, Ash Wednesday, the First Sunday in Lent, the First and Second Sundays after Easter, and the Feasts of SS. Philip and James, Luke, Andrew, Thomas, Matthias, Mark, Barnabas, John Baptist, Peter, Matthew, Simon and Jude, and All Saints. (Subsequently in 1662 four more new Collects were added—for the Third Sunday in Advent, the Sixth Sunday after Epiphany, St. Stephen's Day and Easter Eve.)

The first Prayer Book of Edward VI was soon followed by a second, published in 1552. Of their subsequent history this is not the place to speak, but the final revision—made in 1662 in the reign of Charles II—is that still in official use in the Church of England today. It is the only Prayer Book which has legal authority within that Church.

In more recent times various branches of the Anglican Communion have made their own revisions of the *Book of Common Prayer*, and in 1928 a proposed revision was presented to Parliament for general use in England, but was refused authorisation. In the following pages the alternative Collects, Epistles and Gospels proposed in that book have not been included, but note has been taken of two of its additions—the Feast of the Transfiguration and St. Mary Magdalen—both of which it is widely felt should be restored to their place among the “Red Letter Days”.

# PRAYER BOOK CHART







## The First Sunday in Advent

### THE COLLECT

**A**LMIGHTY God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious Majesty to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal, through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. *Amen.*

*This Collect is to be repeated every day, with the other Collects in Advent, until Christmas Eve.*

### THE EPISTLE

ROMANS 13. 8

#### *Christ's coming into human life*

Keep out of debt altogether, except that perpetual debt of love which we owe one another. The man who loves his neighbour has obeyed the whole Law in regard to his neighbour. For the commandments, "Thou shalt not commit adultery", "Thou shalt not kill", "Thou shalt not steal", "Thou shalt not covet" and all other commandments are summed up in this one saying: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Love hurts nobody: therefore love is the answer to the Law's commands.

Why all this stress on behaviour? Because, as I think you have realised, the present time is of the highest importance—it is time to wake up to reality. Every day brings God's salvation nearer.

The night is nearly over, the day has almost dawned. Let us therefore fling away the things that men do in the dark, let us

arm ourselves for the fight of the day! Let us live cleanly, as in the daylight, not in the "delights" of getting drunk or playing with sex, nor yet in quarrelling or jealousies. Let us be Christ's men from head to foot, and give no chances to the flesh to have its fling.

THE GOSPEL

ST. MATTHEW 21. I

*Christ comes to Jerusalem*

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples ahead telling them, "Go into the village in front of you and you will at once find there an ass tethered, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. Should anyone say anything to you, you are to say, 'The Lord needs them', and he will send them immediately."

All this happened to fulfil the prophet's saying:

Tell ye the daughter of Zion,  
Behold, thy King cometh unto thee,  
Meek, and riding upon an ass,  
And upon a colt the foal of an ass.

So the disciples went off and followed Jesus' instructions. They brought the ass and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and Jesus took his seat. Then most of the crowd spread their own cloaks on the road, while others cut down branches from the trees and spread them in his path. The crowds who went in front of him and the crowds who followed behind him all shouted, "God save the Son of David! Blessed is the man who comes in the name of the Lord! God save him from on high!"

And as he entered Jerusalem a shock ran through the whole city. "Who *is* this?" men cried. "This is Jesus the prophet," replied the crowd, "the man from Nazareth in Galilee!"

Then Jesus went into the Temple and drove out all the buyers and sellers there. He overturned the tables of the money-changers and the benches of those who sold doves, crying:

“It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer.’ But you have turned it into a thieves’ kitchen!”

---

## The Three Comings

(*Advent* is from a Latin word which means ‘*a coming*’.)

The season of Advent is often thought of as a preparation for Christmas—when we celebrate the birth of Jesus, just as Lent is a preparation for Easter—when we celebrate his resurrection. But the season also starts off a *new Christian Year*. No year stands alone; it is linked with the past and the future. Advent speaks of a coming of Jesus Christ to match each of these three—past, future and present. The Collect for this Sunday tells us about these comings.

\* \* \*

The first was when Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to earth and humbled himself by taking upon him our human nature. He lived as a man among men, teaching them about God and showing them what God is like, and in his amazing death upon the cross he revealed the depths of divine love. This the Collect describes in the words, “He came to *visit us* in great *humility*.”

\* \* \*

But in the future there will be another coming. Then Jesus will come as King (“in his glorious Majesty”) to judge all men—the living and those who have died. (“Quick” = living.) When people talk about “the second coming”, “the day of judgement”, “the last day”, they are referring to this basic Christian belief (see the *Apostles’ Creed*).

The Gospel recalls the day when Jesus was hailed as King, as the Deliverer or Messiah whom God had promised to send to his people. But there we see him as Judge also—there is no room in the Kingdom of Christ for a “thieves’ kitchen”!

\* \* \*



So much for the past and the future, but what of the present? Here we turn to the Epistle—so up-to-date when translated into our everyday language. St. Paul sets out in unmistakable terms what is demanded of the Christian who owns Christ as his King and his Judge. "Let us be Christ's men from head to foot." "It is time to wake up to reality." But while victory will not be won without the most resolute effort, neither will it come without the help (or "grace") of Christ himself. His "coming" in the present is in answer to our prayers. "Give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness" and "arm ourselves for the fight of the day"—*now*.

## The Second Sunday in Advent

### THE COLLECT

**B**LESSED Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience, and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

ROMANS 15. 4

*God was, and God is*

For all those words which were written long ago are meant to teach us today; that when we read in the scriptures of the endurance of men and of all the help that God gave them in those days, we may be encouraged to go on hoping in our own time. May the God who inspires men to endure, and gives them a Father's care, give you a mind united towards one another because of your common loyalty to Jesus Christ. And then, as one man, you will sing from the heart the praises of God the



Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. So open your hearts to one another as Christ has opened his heart to you, and God will be glorified.

Christ was made a servant of the Jews to prove God's trustworthiness, since he personally implemented the promises made long ago to the fathers, and also that the gentiles might bring glory to God for his mercy to them. It is written:

Therefore will I give praise unto thee among the gentiles  
And sing unto thy name.

And again:

Rejoice, ye gentiles, with his people.

And yet again:

Praise the Lord, all ye gentiles;  
And let all the peoples praise him.

And then Isaiah says:

There shall be the root of Jesse,  
And he that ariseth to rule over the gentiles:  
On him shall the gentiles hope.

May the God of hope fill *you* with joy and peace in your faith, that by the power of the Holy Spirit, your whole life and outlook may be radiant with hope.

THE GOSPEL

ST. LUKE 21. 25

*Christ's final coming*

"There will be signs in the sun and moon and stars, and on the earth there will be dismay among the nations and bewilderment at the roar of the surging sea. Men's courage will fail completely as they realise what is threatening the world, for the very powers of heaven will be shaken. Then men will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with great power and splendour! But

when these things begin to happen, look up, hold your heads high, for you will soon be free."

Then he gave them a parable.

"Look at a fig-tree, or indeed any tree, when it begins to burst its buds, and you realise without anybody telling you that summer is nearly here. So, when you see these things happening, you can be equally sure that the kingdom of God has nearly come. Believe me, this generation will not disappear until all this has taken place. Earth and heaven will pass away, but my words will never pass away."

---

## The Scriptures and Christ's Coming

This week's readings again have to do with past, present and future. God is always there—*all the time*.

The Epistle shows that the lessons of the past have come down to us in the Scriptures; "words written long ago are meant to teach us today". That is why we pray in the Collect for help to "hear" the Scriptures, "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them." Those who study the Bible this way learn what God is, what he has done and what he yet will do; and so they come to "embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life".

\* \* \*

All true Christians share this hope through Jesus Christ, the universal Saviour. They ought then to be united and to show their unity at least by worshipping together—"as one man to sing from the heart the praises of God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ". St. Paul would surely have no use for the separate Churches we know today, some refusing the sacrament to Christians of a different denomination and some even refusing to unite in saying the Lord's Prayer. Though important movements towards reunion are taking place, the divisions of the Church remain a disgraceful scandal and dishonour God.

St. Paul is challenging all of us who claim the name “Christian” to pray and to work for Church unity.

\* \* \*

Further, race and nationality must not be allowed to divide Christians. Our Saviour has opened the kingdom of heaven to *all* believers. St. Paul shows this was part of God’s plan by four quotations from the Old Testament—see Psalm 18. 49; Deuteronomy 32. 43; Psalm 117. 1; and Isaiah 11. 10. Today the question for us is not so much one of Jew and Gentile as of white and coloured races. Yet the lesson is the same; all are one in Christ Jesus. There can be no “colour bar” in the Church of God.

\* \* \*

The Gospel is one of the New Testament descriptions of the *visible* coming of Jesus at the end of history. “Then men will *see* the Son of Man coming in a cloud with great power and splendour.” The earliest disciples mistakenly thought that this last day would come about almost at once. It has not come yet. But it is part of the faith of the Church that it will—one day. “And he shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead: Whose kingdom shall have no end.”

## The Third Sunday in Advent

### THE COLLECT

**O** LORD Jesu Christ, who at thy first coming didst send thy messenger to prepare thy way before thee; Grant that the ministers and stewards of thy mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready thy way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at thy second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in thy sight, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end. *Amen.*



*Trust us, but make no hasty judgements*

You should look upon us as ministers of Christ, as trustees of the secrets of God. And it is a prime requisite in a trustee that he should prove worthy of his trust. But, as a matter of fact, it matters very little to me what you, or any man, thinks of me—I don't even value my opinion of myself. For I might be quite ignorant of any fault in myself—but that doesn't justify me before God. My only true judge is the Lord.

The moral of this is that we should make no hasty or premature judgements. When the Lord comes he will bring into the light of day all that at present is hidden in darkness, and he will expose the secret motives of men's hearts. Then shall God himself give each man his share of praise.

*Christ's testimony to John*

John the Baptist was in prison when he heard what Christ was doing, and he sent a message through his own disciples asking the question, "Are you the one who was to come or are we to look for somebody else?"

Jesus gave them this reply, "Go and tell John what you see and hear—that blind men are recovering their sight, cripples are walking, lepers being healed, the deaf hearing, the dead being brought to life and the good news is being given to those in need. *And happy is the man who never loses his faith in me.*"

As John's disciples were going away Jesus began talking to the crowd about John:

"What did you go out into the desert to look at? A reed waving in the breeze? No? Then *what* was it you went out to see?—a man dressed in fine clothes? But the men who wear fine clothes live in the courts of kings! But what did you really go to see—a prophet? Yes, I tell you, a prophet and far more than a prophet! This is the man of whom the scripture says:



Behold, I send my messenger before thy face,  
Who shall prepare thy way before thee."

---

### The Ministry and Christ's Coming

The third Sunday in Advent is concerned with the ministry of the Church—its bishops, priests and deacons—those living agents through whom Christ's coming is to be made known and understood. (This is specially suitable at a time when a great number of ordinations take place.)

In the Collect, the clergy are described as the "ministers and stewards of Christ's mysteries". The first two sentences of the Epistle show what is meant here.

Further, the Christian minister's work is "to prepare and make ready" the way for Christ "by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just"—a fine description of a parson's job! He is not only to reveal sin for what it is, and as something to be sorry for, but he is to lead men to a new life of consecrated service. True "wisdom" means loving what God loves, and the "just" are those who make this wisdom the guiding rule of their lives.

\* \* \*

Behind the Epistle is the idea of the *four men* who can be found in every man: there is the man the world sees; the man as his closest friends see him; the man as he sees himself; and the man as God sees him. Only the last of these is the man *as he really is*. This is a reason, says St. Paul, for being slow to judge and criticise. "Make no hasty or premature judgements." Criticism of the parson is easy enough and sometimes deserved; prayer for him and his work is far less easy and perhaps less common, but is infinitely more important.

\* \* \*

It is quite clear from the first words of the Collect and the last words of the Gospel (see Malachi 3. 1) that we are to draw

a parallel between John the Baptist and a Christian minister. Like the Baptist the minister is to be a man of faith, simplicity of life, and courage. We should pray that all clergy may show these qualities in their ministry.

## The Fourth Sunday in Advent

### THE COLLECT

**O** LORD, raise up (we pray thee) thy power, and come among us, and with great might succour us; that whereas, through our sins and wickedness, we are sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us, thy bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us; through the satisfaction of thy Son our Lord, to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost be honour and glory, world without end. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

PHILIPPIANS 4. 4

*Be joyful, be at peace*

Delight yourselves in the Lord, yes, find your joy in him at all times. Have a reputation for gentleness, and never forget the nearness of your Lord.

Don't worry over anything whatever; tell God every detail of your needs in earnest and thankful prayer, and the peace of God, which transcends human understanding, will keep constant guard over your hearts and minds as they rest in Christ Jesus.

### THE GOSPEL

ST. JOHN I. 19

*John's witness to Christ*

This then is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He admitted with complete candour, "I am not Christ."

So they asked him, "Who are you then? Are you Elijah?"

"No, I am not," he replied.

"Are you the Prophet?"

"No," he replied.

"Well, then," they asked again, "who are you? We want to give an answer to the people who sent us. What would you call yourself?"

"I am a voice shouting in the desert, '*Make straight the way of the Lord!*' as Isaiah the prophet said."

Now some of the Pharisees had been sent to John, and they questioned him, "What is the reason, then, for your baptising people if you are not Christ and not Elijah and not the Prophet?"

To which John returned, "I do baptise—with water. But somewhere among you stands a man you do not know. He comes after me, it is true, but I am not fit to undo his shoes!" (All this happened in the Bethany on the far side of the Jordan where the baptisms of John took place.)

---

## The Nearness of the Lord

The words in the Epistle—"Never forget the nearness of your Lord"—provide the theme for this Sunday, and the emphasis is on the fact of the Divine presence *here and now*.

Faith has still its Olivet  
And love its Galilee.

The Collect is addressed to God the Father and we ask him to give us power to "run the race that is set before us", in spite of the hindrances of our sins. We are bold to ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, who died upon the cross "for us men and for our salvation".

Note that "succour" means "come to our aid"; "sore let" means "seriously prevented". For "running the race that is set before us", see Hebrews 12. 1. The "satisfaction" was the perfect, fully consecrated life which our Lord lived and offered

to God in our name, and in virtue of which a loving, forgiving God can accept us.

\* \* \*

The Epistle shows that the nearness of the Divine Presence, once it is realised, becomes a reason for joy and happiness. We know there *is* Someone to hear our prayers and give us peace.

\* \* \*

In the Gospel for the Sunday before Christmas we stand with John the Baptist as he points forward to Jesus, the true Messiah and Lord of all. Again the stress is on the nearness of the Lord, who often goes unrecognised. "Somewhere among you stands a man you do not know." But this need not happen, if, like Brother Lawrence, we *practise the Presence of God*.

THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD  
or  
THE BIRTHDAY OF CHRIST  
commonly called

Christmas Day

(December 25th)

THE COLLECT

ALMIGHTY God, who hast given us thy only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and as at this time to be born of a pure Virgin; Grant that we being regenerate, and made thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit; through the same our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the same Spirit, ever one God, world without end. *Amen.*



*God reveals Himself*

God, who gave to our forefathers many different glimpses of the truth in the words of the prophets, has now, at the end of the present age, given us the truth in the Son. Through the Son God made the whole universe, and to the Son he has ordained that all creation shall ultimately belong. This Son, radiance of the glory of God, flawless expression of the nature of God, himself the upholding principle of all that is, effected in person the reconciliation between God and man and then took his seat at the right hand of the majesty on high—thus proving himself, by the more glorious name that he has won, far greater than all the angels of God.

For to which of the angels did he ever say such words as these:

Thou art my Son,  
This day have I begotten thee?

Or, again:

I will be to him a Father,  
And he shall be to me a Son?

Further, when he brings his first-born into this world of men, he says:

Let all the angels of God worship him.

This is what he says of the angels:

Who maketh his angels winds  
And his ministers a flame of fire.

But when he speaks of the Son, he says:

Thy throne, O *God*, is for ever and ever;  
And the sceptre of uprightness is the sceptre of thy  
kingdom.

Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity;  
Therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee  
With the oil of gladness above thy fellows.

He also says:

Thou, *Lord*, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of  
the earth,  
And the heavens are the work of thy hands:  
They shall perish, but thou continuest:  
And they all shall wax old as doth a garment;  
And as a mantle shalt thou roll them up,  
As a garment, and they shall be changed:  
But thou art the same,  
And thy years shall not fail.

THE GOSPEL

ST. JOHN I. I

*God enters human life*

At the beginning God expressed himself. That personal expression, that word, was with God and was God, and he existed with God from the beginning. All creation took place through him, and none took place without him. In him appeared life and this life was the light of mankind. The light still shines in the darkness and the darkness has never put it out.

A man called John was sent by God as a witness to the light, so that any man who heard his testimony might believe in the light. This man was not himself the light: he was sent simply as a personal witness to that light.

That was the true light which shines upon every man as he comes into the world. He came into the world—the world he had created—and the world failed to recognise him. He came into his own creation, and his own people would not accept him. Yet wherever men did accept him he gave them the power to become sons of God. These were the men who truly believed in him, and their birth depended not on the course of nature nor on any impulse or plan of man, but on God.

So the word of God became a human being and lived among us. We saw his splendour (the splendour as of a father's only son), full of grace and truth.

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## The Divinity of Christ

The birth of Jesus Christ has been celebrated on a special day from early times, though it was not at first widespread nor was it always celebrated on the same day. The real date of our Lord's birth is unknown. In the fourth century it began to be generally observed on December 25th, perhaps as a counterblast to the Roman festivals of the "sun-god" at the time of the winter solstice. December 25th as the date for keeping the anniversary of Christ's birth is now universal in the West. (Note that the Collect does not claim that this day is the *actual* day; it is rather the *official* day—"as at this time.")

\* \* \*

We like to think of Christmas as a family festival of happiness, joy and jollification, and all stemming from God's love in giving to the world his only-begotten Son; but the Church in its teaching moves on much beyond this. It was "*for us men and for our salvation*" that Jesus came down from heaven (Nicene Creed). *The birth of our Lord is linked at once with our new birth*—our new status in God's family—through baptism. Then, according to the Church Catechism, we were each "made a member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven". So the Collect turns our eyes back to the font. There we were "regenerated", or born again into God's family; this is God's free gift (his "grace") brought about by the process of "adoption".

But this is not all. To live our lives in the family into which we have been adopted we need *help* from outside ourselves as well as self-help from within. *This is what we ask for on Christmas*



Day—in the words of the Collect “that we may daily be renewed by the Holy Spirit” .

\* \* \*

Notice how the Gospel lights this up. “Wherever men did accept him, he gave them the power to become sons of God. These were the men who truly believed in him, and their birth depended not on the course of nature nor on any impulse or plan of man, but on God.” He was

Born to raise the sons of earth  
Born to give them second birth.

\* \* \*

So far these notes have shown how the Church on Christmas Day links up the divine Incarnation (a word which simply means “taking flesh”) with each Christian in his own life. But we are also called upon to see *the event in itself*. It is the most important thing that ever happened! However it may be explained, the birth of Jesus Christ is a fact of history: we date our records by it—B.C., before Christ; A.D. *anno domini*, in the year of our Lord—and it cannot be discarded as a mere legend or a piece of wishful thinking, a hope or a dream.

\* \* \*

The Epistle and Gospel have these points in mind. The letter to the Jewish Christians makes it plain that the Son of God has come—he who is Maker, Keeper, Saviour of the world. This is a very different thing from the coming of a prophet or an angel. The same thoughts again are found in the Gospel, though expressed more profoundly. “God expressed himself. That personal expression, that word, was with God and was God, and he existed with God from the beginning.” “The word of God became a human being and lived among us.” “His life was the light of mankind. The light still shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out.”



# St. Stephen's Day

(December 26th)

## THE COLLECT

**G**RANT, O Lord, that, in all our sufferings here upon earth for the testimony of thy truth, we may steadfastly look up to heaven, and by faith behold the glory that shall be revealed; and, being filled with the Holy Ghost, may learn to love and bless our persecutors by the example of thy first Martyr St. Stephen, who prayed for his murderers to thee, O blessed Jesus, who standest at the right hand of God to succour all those that suffer for thee, our only Mediator and Advocate. *Amen.*

## FOR THE EPISTLE

ACTS 7. 55

### *Faithfulness leads to death*

Stephen, filled through all his being with the Holy Spirit, looked steadily up into Heaven. He saw the glory of God, and Jesus himself standing at his right hand.

"Look!" he exclaimed, "the heavens are opened and I can see the Son of Man standing at God's right hand!"

At this they put their fingers in their ears. Yelling with fury, as one man they made a rush at him and hustled him out of the city and stoned him. The witnesses of the execution flung their clothes at the feet of a young man by the name of Saul.

So they stoned Stephen while he called upon God, and said, "Jesus, Lord, receive my spirit!"

Then, on his knees, he cried in ringing tones,

"Lord, forgive them for this sin."

And with these words he fell into the sleep of death, while Saul gave silent assent to his execution.

## THE GOSPEL

ST. MATTHEW 23. 34

### *Jesus prophesies persecution*

"Listen to this: I am sending you prophets and wise and learned men; and some of these you will kill and crucify, others you will

flog in your synagogues and hunt from town to town. So that on your hands is all the innocent blood spilt on this earth, from the blood of Abel the good to the blood of Zachariah, Barachiah's son, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. Yes, I tell you that all this will be laid at the doors of this generation.

"Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem! You murder the prophets and stone the messengers that are sent to you. How often have I longed to gather your children round me like a bird gathering her brood together under her wings—and you would never have it. Now all you have left is your house. I tell you that you will never see me again till the day when you cry, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'"

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### Steadfast and Forgiving

The feast of Stephen commemorates the first Christian martyr. He was one of the seven men appointed by the Apostles to distribute food and other necessities to the poor of the growing Christian community in Jerusalem, so that the Apostles themselves would have more time for their proper spiritual duties. But Stephen was also a forthright preacher; he took every chance of speaking in the synagogues and never pulled his punches when declaring the Gospel. In the end the Sanhedrin—the Jewish governing Council—stung to fury by Stephen's bitter denunciations of their treatment of Jesus, hustled him out of the city and stoned him to death, the stoning being started by those who had given evidence at his trial. These final moments are described in the Epistle. Saul—afterwards Paul—is mentioned there and it may have been Stephen's serene behaviour under such appalling cruelty which proved the starting point of Saul's conversion.

\* \* \*

The Collect derives its meaning from the Epistle and is one of the few Collects addressed directly to Jesus. In the prayer

we ask for two things: first, for the “vision glorious”, so as to be able to stand firm in hard and troubled times; second, for power through the Holy Ghost to love, bless and forgive our enemies.

\* \* \*

The Gospel is a reminder that what happened to Stephen had already been forecast by our Lord. Stephen was one of the “prophets and wise and learned men”. But it also contains our Lord’s warning of the consequences of refusing to break with the past, by the only possible way—that of repentance and submission to the will of God. Jerusalem was destroyed as Jesus prophesied it would be, and Josephus tells the story (*Jewish Wars, Book II*). There is no more terrible reading in the whole of history.

## St. John the Evangelist’s Day

(December 27th)

### THE COLLECT

MERCIFUL Lord, we beseech thee to cast thy bright beams of light upon thy Church, that it being enlightened by the doctrine of thy blessed Apostle and Evangelist St. John may so walk in the light of thy truth, that it may at length attain to the light of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

I ST. JOHN I. I

### *Living in the light*

We are writing to you about something which has always existed yet which we ourselves actually saw and heard: something which we had opportunity to observe closely and even to hold in our hands, and yet, as we know now, was something of the very Word of life himself! For it was *life* which appeared



before us: we saw it, we are eye-witnesses of it, and are now writing to you about it. It was the very life of all ages, the life that has always existed with the Father, which actually became visible in person to us mortal men. We repeat, we really saw and heard what we are now writing to you about. We want you to be with us in this—in this fellowship with the Father, and Jesus Christ his Son. We must write and tell you about it, because the more that fellowship extends the greater the joy it brings to us who are already in it.

Here, then, is the message which we heard from him, and now proclaim to you: GOD IS LIGHT, and no shadow of darkness can exist in him. Consequently, if we were to say that we enjoyed fellowship with him and still went on living in darkness, we should be both telling and living a lie. But if we really are living in the same light in which he eternally exists, then we have true fellowship with each other, and the blood which his Son shed for us keeps us clean from all sin. If we refuse to admit that we are sinners, then we live in a world of illusion and truth becomes a stranger to us. But if we freely admit that we have sinned, we find God utterly reliable and straightforward—he forgives our sins and makes us thoroughly clean from all that is evil. For if we take up the attitude “we have not sinned”, we flatly deny God’s diagnosis of our condition and cut ourselves off from what he has to say to us.

THE GOSPEL

ST. JOHN 21. 19

*The command is to “follow”*

Jesus said to Peter, “You must follow me.”

Then Peter turned round and noticed the disciple whom Jesus loved following behind them. (He was the one who had his head on Jesus’ shoulder at supper and had asked, “Lord, who is the one who is going to betray you?”) So he said, “Yes, Lord, but what about him?”

“If it is my wish,” returned Jesus, “for him to stay until I come, is that your business, Peter? You must follow me.”



This gave rise to the saying among the brothers that this disciple would not die. Yet, of course, Jesus did not say, "He will not die", but simply, "If it is my wish for him to stay until I come, is that your business?"

Now it is this same disciple who is hereby giving his testimony to these things and has written them down. We know that his witness is reliable. Of course, there are many other things which Jesus did, and I suppose that if each one were written down in detail, there would not be room in the whole world for all the books that would have to be written.

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## Living in the Light

John was one of the twelve Apostles of Jesus, and along with his brother James, and Peter, was chosen by Jesus to share in special experiences—the Transfiguration, for instance, and the withdrawal in Gethsemane. He is not mentioned by name in the Fourth Gospel, though he is usually thought to have been "the disciple whom Jesus loved", referred to repeatedly in that Gospel. If this is so, it was to John that Jesus entrusted his mother at the time of his crucifixion.

John is mentioned in the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles along with Peter. Tradition has it that he lived to a great age and died at Ephesus when he was an hundred years old, outliving the rest of the twelve.

\* \* \*

The Collect, by calling him Evangelist as well as Apostle, makes the assumption that it was he who wrote the Gospel (and Epistles) which bear his name. This traditional view is disputed today by many scholars, though some hold that the Gospel incorporates the reminiscences of John in his old age, recorded by one of his disciples at Ephesus.

\* \* \*

The last chapter of the Fourth Gospel, from which today's selection is taken, is generally believed to have been an appendix,

added possibly by another hand. We gather that John must have lived to a very great age since the report went round that he would live on until Jesus came again. Earlier in the chapter Peter has been commissioned to shepherd the sheep of Christ—"Feed my sheep": John's task is to witness to the story of Christ, and we may suppose the words, "we know that his witness is reliable", to have come from the elders of the Church in Ephesus who had known and revered the aged apostle.

\* \* \*

In the Gospel, and first Epistle of John, God is made known as Light, as Love and as Life. The first of these is dealt with in the Epistle and Collect. "GOD IS LIGHT, and no shadow of darkness can exist in him." To live the Christian life is to live "in the light", and so the prayer is that God who is Light, will cast his beams upon the Church, and that this Light may be reflected through John's writings to become the light by which men live and finally obtain eternal life.

## The Innocents' Day

(December 28th)

### THE COLLECT

O ALMIGHTY God, who out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast ordained strength, and madest infants to glorify thee by their deaths; Mortify and kill all vices in us, and so strengthen us by thy grace, that by the innocency of our lives, and constancy of our faith even unto death, we may glorify thy holy Name: through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

FOR THE EPISTLE

REVELATION 14. 1

### *The First of the Redeemed*

Then I looked again and before my eyes the Lamb was standing on Mount Sion, and with him were a hundred and forty-four

thousand who had his name and his Father's name written upon their foreheads. Then I heard a sound coming from Heaven like the roar of a great waterfall and the heavy rolling of thunder. Yet the sound which I heard was also like the music of harpists sweeping their strings. And now they are singing a new song of praise before the throne, and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn that song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand who had been redeemed from the earth. These are the men who have never defiled themselves with women, for they are celibate. These are the men who follow the Lamb wherever he may go; these men have been redeemed from among mankind as first-fruits to God and to the Lamb. They have never been guilty of any falsehood; they are beyond reproach.

THE GOSPEL

ST. MATTHEW 2. 13

*Herod and the new-born King*

But after the wise men had gone the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up now, take the little child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you. For Herod means to seek out the child and kill him."

So Joseph got up, and taking the child and his mother with him in the middle of the night, set off for Egypt, where he remained until Herod's death.

This again is a fulfilment of the Lord's word spoken through the prophet:

Out of Egypt did I call my son.

When Herod saw that he had been fooled by the wise men he was furiously angry. He issued orders, and killed all the male children of two years and under in Bethlehem and the surrounding district—basing his calculation on his careful questioning of the wise men.

Then Jeremiah's prophecy was fulfilled:



A voice was heard in Ramah,  
Weeping and great mourning,  
Rachel weeping for her children;  
And she would not be comforted, because they are not.

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### How God is Glorified

The message of Christmas is that God came into the world to reveal himself and his purposes and to save the world. How great the need for this was is clearly shown by Herod's cruel and senseless slaughter of helpless infants in Bethlehem—infants who thus by their deaths glorified God (Collect).

Children have their part to play in the divine scheme of things. Of this the writer of Psalm 8 (whose words begin the Collect and were quoted by our Lord himself) was well aware. God's strength is revealed through the innocence, love and trust of little children rather than through the violent who rage and slay, and revel in tumult and brute force.

The Christian on this day is bidden to pray that he too may glorify God, but in his life rather than by his death; he therefore asks God to "mortify and kill"—that is "deaden and destroy"—all his vices, so that he may become more and more sound in faith and holy in life.

\* \* \*

In the Middle Ages, Innocents' Day was known as *Childermas* Day; there were processions of children, black vestments were worn in the churches and the bells rang muffled peals. It was popularly believed that the number of those who died was 144,000, an idea derived from the Epistle, but considering the population of Bethlehem the number would be quite small—perhaps not more than twenty at the most.

The Epistle presents us with a vision of the Lamb (i.e. Christ) and the first of the redeemed, among whom we are meant to include the Holy Innocents. The three final sentences of the Epistle are hard to understand, but they should not be



taken as meaning that only celibate men can be redeemed, and that women and those who have been married are excluded! In the Gospels there is no condemnation of marriage, but the highest view of it known to man; perhaps this writer, like some other early Christian writers, had become infected with the typically Eastern view of the body and all its desires and passions as essentially evil, good being possible only to the "spiritual". In any case those he describes are "first-fruits to God and to the Lamb"—only a first instalment of the "multitude which no man can number".

## The Sunday after Christmas Day

### THE COLLECT

ALMIGHTY God, who hast given us thy only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and as at this time to be born of a pure Virgin; Grant that we being regenerate, and made thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit; through the same our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the same Spirit, ever one God, world without end. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

### GALATIANS 4. I

#### *We are God's sons*

You must realise that so long as an heir is a child, though he is destined to be master of everything, he is, in practice, no different from a servant. He has to obey a guardian or trustee until the time which his father has chosen for him to receive his inheritance. So is it with us: while we were "children" we lived under the authority of basic moral principles. But when the proper time came God sent his Son, born of a human mother and born under the jurisdiction of the Law, that he might redeem those who were under the authority of the Law and lead

us into becoming, by adoption, true sons of God. It is because you really are his sons that God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts to cry "Father, dear Father". You, my brother, are not a servant any longer; through God you are a *son*. And, if you are a son, then you are certainly an heir.

THE GOSPEL

ST. MATTHEW I. 18

*Christ becomes a Son of Man*

The birth of Jesus Christ happened like this. When Mary was engaged to Joseph, just before their marriage, she was discovered to be pregnant—by the Holy Spirit. Whereupon Joseph, her future husband, who was a good man and did not want to see her disgraced, planned to break off the engagement quietly. But while he was turning the matter over in his mind an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife! What she has conceived is conceived through the Holy Spirit, and she will give birth to a son, whom you will call Jesus ('the Saviour') for it is he who will save his people from their sins."

All this happened to fulfil what the Lord has said through the prophet:

Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel. ("Immanuel" means "God with us".)

When Joseph woke up he did what the angel had told him. He married Mary, but had no intercourse with her until she had given birth to a son. Then he gave him the name Jesus.

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Sonship

The Collect for Christmas Day is repeated on the Sunday following; for notes on the Collect see Christmas Day. Note

the title of this Sunday; it is *not* called the Sunday after Christmas, for the great Christmas truth is still before us.

The Epistle takes up the question of our adoption into the family of God mentioned in the Collect. "When the proper time came God sent his Son, born of a human mother and born under the jurisdiction of the Law, that he might redeem those who were under the authority of the Law, and lead us into becoming, by adoption, true sons of God."

We may suppose Paul putting his argument to us in other words. He might say, "this is what I mean. An heir, while an infant or a small child, is no different from a slave; they are both under rudimentary discipline. Well, this is how it was at the start; God had to begin by providing the rudimentary discipline of the Law. But when the heir ceases to be a little child and grows up, he discovers his freedom and liberty and parts company with the slave. So it is with us; when we grow up and attain our status as 'true sons of God', we pass from the bondage and discipline of the Law to the liberty of the Gospel. The adoption is into a new relationship with God through Christ. It means maturity—'grown-upness'—of life in the Spirit, and therefore a new responsibility. That is why we pray daily to be 'renewed by the Holy Spirit' (Collect). God gives us the *status* of sons that we may develop the *character* of sons".

\* \* \*

The Gospel gives St. Matthew's account of the birth of Christ, told from the standpoint of Joseph, as that of St. Luke is from Mary's. The first Gospel tells us almost all that is recorded of the character of the man who was chosen by God to be our Lord's earthly father.

The prophecy about the virgin bearing a son is from Isaiah 7. 14. The Isaiah passage containing this verse forms the Epistle for the Feast of the Annunciation and the reader is referred to the notes under that day.



# The Circumcision of Christ

(January 1st)

## THE COLLECT

**A**LMIGHTY God, who madest thy blessed Son to be circumcised, and obedient to the law for man; Grant us the true Circumcision of the Spirit; that, our hearts, and all our members, being mortified from all worldly and carnal lusts, we may in all things obey thy blessed will; through the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

## THE EPISTLE

ROMANS 4. 7

*Faith is more important than circumcision*

Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven  
And whose sins are covered.

Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not reckon sin.

Now the question, an important one, arises: is this happiness for the circumcised only, or for the uncircumcised as well?

Note this carefully. We began by saying that Abraham's faith was counted unto him for righteousness. When this happened, was he a circumcised man? He was not, he was still uncircumcised. It was *afterwards* that the sign of circumcision was given to him, as a seal upon that righteousness which God was accounting to him *as yet an uncircumcised man*! God's purpose here is twofold. First, that Abraham might be the spiritual father of all who since that time, despite their uncircumcision, show the faith that is counted as righteousness. Then, secondly, that he might be the circumcised father of all those who are not only circumcised, but are living by the same sort of faith which he himself had before he was circumcised.

The ancient promise made to Abraham and his descendants, that they should eventually possess the world, was given not because of any achievements made through obedience to the Law, but because of the righteousness which had its root in



faith. For if, after all, they who pin their faith to keeping the Law were to inherit God's world, it would make nonsense of faith in God himself, and destroy the whole point of the promise.

THE GOSPEL

ST. LUKE 2. 15

*Jesus is accepted as a Jewish boy*

When the angels left them and went back into Heaven, the shepherds said to each other,

“Now let us go straight to Bethlehem and see this thing which the Lord has made known to us.”

So they came as fast as they could and they found Mary and Joseph—and the baby lying in the manger. And when they had seen this sight, they told everybody what had been said to them about the little child. And those who heard them were amazed at what the shepherds said. But Mary treasured all these things and turned them over in her mind. The shepherds went back to work, glorifying and praising God for everything that they had heard and seen, which had happened just as they had been told.

At the end of the eight days, the time came for circumcising the child and he was called Jesus, the name given to him by the angel before his conception.

*The same Collect, Epistle, and Gospel shall serve for every day after, until the Epiphany.*

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## Consecration

The feast of the Circumcision is kept by the Church on the eighth day after Christmas because, as the Gospel says, “at the end of the eight days, the time came for circumcising the child and he was called Jesus”.

Circumcision, the cutting away of the foreskin, was regarded by the Jews everywhere as a religious initiation. Our Lord was initiated by circumcision at the usual time, becoming “obedient

to the law for man". This rite had been understood as the external act sealing God's covenant with his people Israel ever since Abraham's time—a point introduced by Paul in the Epistle.

\* \* \*

The passage from Romans is obscure and difficult—a typical example of the Jewish rabbi's way of arguing. Paul was writing to "Judaisers" in the Church. They were the people who wanted to make circumcision compulsory for all Christians, Gentiles as well as Jews, because they thought of the new Gospel and its Church as no more than a sect of Judaism. Paul in his argument went back to Abraham. He showed that it was Abraham's *faith* which secured that he was accounted right with God; his faith came first and circumcision came after; circumcision was merely the way the covenant was "tied up" or sealed. The order with Abraham was (1) faith, (2) being accounted righteous, (3) circumcision. He was thus the "spiritual father" both of the uncircumcised Gentiles who showed "the faith that is counted as righteousness", and also of the circumcised Jews who were living by the same sort of faith.

\* \* \*

It will be seen from this that Paul wanted to show religion as a matter of the spirit rather than the letter. He was concerned with the inner motives and attitudes (faith), rather than with outward acts and conforming to set rules.

We know this distinction only too well; it is with us still. The Collect, although it uses old-fashioned language, is right on the spot—being a prayer for complete self-consecration of body, mind and spirit. There can be no reservations; the spiritual circumcision for which we pray ("spirit" should be spelt with a small "s" as it probably refers to man's own spirit rather than the Holy Spirit) is a seal of our complete devotion to the will of God; no part of our total self (none of "our members", i.e. limbs, parts of the body) is exempt from serving his will; and where worldliness and the temptations of the flesh

(worldly and carnal lusts) claim the mastery over our lives they must be given no quarter.

\* \* \*

The Feast of the Circumcision falls always on January 1st. Its general lesson is not inappropriate for the beginning of a new year, which is in a sense a fresh start, the beginning of a new chapter in our lives. The poet echoes the thought of the Collect:

With parted lips and outstretched hands  
And listening ears thy servant stands;  
Call thou early, call thou late,  
To thy great service dedicate. (Sorley.)

## THE EPIPHANY or the

### Manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles (January 6th)

#### THE COLLECT

O GOD, who by the leading of a star didst manifest thy only-begotten Son to the Gentiles; Mercifully grant, that we, which know thee now by faith, may after this life have the fruition of thy glorious Godhead; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

#### THE EPISTLE

#### EPHESIANS 3. 1

#### *God's plan for all men*

It is in this great cause that I, Paul, have become a prisoner of Christ Jesus for you gentiles. For you must have heard how God gave me grace to become your minister, and how he allowed me



to understand his secret by giving me a direct revelation. (What I have written briefly of this above will explain to you my knowledge of the mystery of Christ.) This secret was hidden to past generations of mankind, but it has now, by the Spirit, been made plain to God's consecrated messengers and prophets. It is simply this: that the gentiles, who were previously excluded from God's agreements, are to be equal heirs with his chosen people, equal members and equal partners in God's promise given by Christ through the Gospel. And I was made a minister of that Gospel by the grace he gave me, and by the power with which he equipped me. Yes, to me, less than the least of all Christians, has God given this grace, to enable me to proclaim to the gentiles the incalculable riches of Christ, and to make plain to all men the meaning of that divine secret which he who created everything has kept hidden from the creation until now. The purpose is that all the angelic powers should now see the complex wisdom of God's plan being worked out through the Church, in conformity to that timeless purpose which he centred in Christ Jesus, our Lord. It is in this same Jesus, because we have faith in him, that we dare, even with confidence, to approach God.

THE GOSPEL

ST. MATTHEW 2. I

*Wise men act in faith*

Jesus was born in Bethlehem, in Judaea, in the days when Herod was king of the province. Not long after his birth there arrived from the East a party of astrologers making for Jerusalem and inquiring as they went, "Where is the child born to be king of the Jews? For we saw his star in the east and we have come here to pay homage to him."

When King Herod heard about this he was deeply perturbed, as indeed were all the other people living in Jerusalem. So he summoned all the Jewish scribes and chief priests together and asked them where "Christ" should be born. Their reply was:



“In Bethlehem, in Judaea, for this is what the prophet wrote about the matter:

And thou Bethlehem, land of Judah,  
Art in no wise least among the princes of Judah:  
For out of thee shall come forth a governor,  
Which shall be shepherd of my people Israel.”

Then Herod invited the wise men to meet him privately and found out from them the exact time when the star appeared. Then he sent them off to Bethlehem saying, “When you get there, search for this little child with the utmost care. And when you have found him come back and tell me—so that I may go and worship him too.”

The wise men listened to the king and then went on their way to Bethlehem. And now the star, which they had seen in the east, went in front of them as they travelled until at last it shone immediately above the place where the little child lay. The sight of the star filled them with indescribable joy.

So they went into the house and saw the little child with his mother Mary. And they fell on their knees and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts—gold, incense and myrrh.

Then, since they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they went back to their own country by a different route.

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### The Unfolding of God's Plan

The Greek word “epiphaneia”, which gives its name to this Season, means “showing”, and in the Gospel we have the story of the infant Christ being shown to the Wise Men. In this story too, is the simple explanation of the secondary title of the day—“The Manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles”.

But there is an altogether deeper meaning in today's selections, and to get at this, “unfolding” is a better word than “showing”. Our thoughts are really directed to the unfolding

of God's plan in the Incarnation, and this comes out in Collect, Epistle and Gospel.

\* \* \*

Notice, for instance, the "unfolding" in the case of the Wise Men. For them it was a star providing a trail to be followed; they acted in faith and were rewarded by seeing the child Jesus—whom they recognised at once for what he was. They fell down and worshipped him.

God's gift and our duty are thus made clear. Bunyan has expressed it for all of us in *Pilgrim's Progress*. The Christian pilgrim asks Evangelist the way. "Then said Evangelist, pointing with his finger over a very wide Field, Do you see yonder wicket-gate? The Man said, No. Then said the other, Do you see yonder shining light? He said, I think I do. Then said Evangelist, Keep that light in your eye, and go up directly thereto, so shalt thou see the Gate; at which when thou knockest, it shall be told thee what thou shalt do."

\* \* \*

The Collect is occupied with the same theme, taking its background from the Gospel. It is a prayer that just as there was an unfolding of God's purpose in the case of the Wise Men, so it may be with us. To the eye of faith, God's purpose is partially unfolded now—not fully, there are far too many unsolved problems for that—and we pray that hereafter we may see God as he is, in all his glory, his purposes for mankind fully unfolded and achieved. ("Fruition" means "full enjoyment".)

\* \* \*

St. Paul in the Epistle is concerned with the same theme. He writes of the unfolding of God's purpose—"that timeless purpose which he centred in Christ Jesus, our Lord". God's "secret was hidden to past generations of mankind, but it has now, by the Spirit, been made plain to God's consecrated messengers and prophets." "It is simply this", he adds, "that

the gentiles . . . are to be . . . equal partners" with the Jews "in God's promise given by Christ through the gospel."

Now in the twentieth century, God is still unfolding his purpose. It is surely his will that the divisions of the world should be ended, whether between white and coloured, East and West, rich and poor, strong and weak, or "haves" and "have nots". In Christ these disunities can be swept away, and when he is manifested, they often are!

## The First Sunday after the Epiphany

### THE COLLECT

**O** LORD, we beseech thee mercifully to receive the prayers of thy people which call upon thee; and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

### ROMANS 12. 1

#### *Our response to God*

With eyes wide open to the mercies of God, I beg you, my brothers, as an act of intelligent worship, to give him your bodies, as a living sacrifice, consecrated to him and acceptable by him. Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God re-mould your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all his demands and moves towards the goal of true maturity.

As your spiritual teacher I give this piece of advice to each one of you. Don't cherish exaggerated ideas of yourself or your importance, but try to have a sane estimate of your capabilities by the light of the faith that God has given to you all. For just as you have many members in one physical body and those



members differ in their functions, so we, though many in number, compose one body in Christ and are all members of one another.

THE GOSPEL

ST. LUKE 2. 41

*Jesus and "His Father's business"*

Every year at the Passover festival, Jesus' parents used to go to Jerusalem. When he was twelve years old they went up to the city as usual for the festival. When it was over they started back home, but the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, without his parents' knowledge. They went a day's journey assuming that he was somewhere in their company, and then they began to look for him among their relations and acquaintances. They failed to find him, however, and turned back to the city, looking for him as they went. Three days later, they found him—in the Temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. All those who heard him were astonished at his powers of comprehension and at the answers that he gave. When Joseph and Mary saw him, they could hardly believe their eyes, and his mother said to him:

"Why have you treated us like this, my son? Here have your father and I been very worried, looking for you everywhere!"

And Jesus replied:

"But why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

But they did not understand his reply. Then he went home with them to Nazareth and was obedient to them. And his mother treasured all these things in her heart. And as Jesus continued to grow in body and mind, he grew also in the love of God and of those who knew him.

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Living in the Light—Knowing and Doing

The Epiphany season is concerned with the Christian life—that life of which Christ himself is the Light. Each Sunday the



Gospel provides a "manifestation of Christ"; the Epistle shows how the special feature of the Gospel is reproduced in the Christian character, and the Collect turns the Sunday lesson into a prayer.

\* \* \*

The first Epiphany Gospel tells of the manifestation of Christ in the Temple. There was always, in every Jewish home, great preparation for a twelve-year-old boy's visit to Jerusalem, and there was much to be learned. Now at last, "knowing" was turned into "doing". Jesus was "at Father's", as a modern boy might say. His Father's house, his Father's business—that and nothing else—was his absorbing interest and concern; so much so that he forgot about his parents (St. Luke 2. 41, 48) and companions, his mind being entirely focused on the teaching of the rabbis.

\* \* \*

The Epistle shows that the Father's business is the concern of every Christian. It means complete devotion to him, in body as well as soul. "Give him your bodies, as a living sacrifice, consecrated to him and acceptable by him." It means also resisting the world around us when it tries to "squeeze us into its mould", for much of its business is not the Father's business. Paul adds an important piece of advice. If we are to commend the Father's business—to prove in practice that God's plan is good—we should be intelligent and sensible about our part in it. There are many contributions to be made. It does not all depend on us. The last thing to do is to cherish exaggerated ideas of our own importance!

\* \* \*

The Collect is a simple prayer that we may "know" God's will (much about it, incidentally, we learn "at Father's"), and that then we may be given strength to "do" it. We certainly need the strength. "Doing" is a great deal harder than "knowing".

We know the paths wherein our feet should press.  
Across our hearts are written thy decrees;  
Yet now, O Lord, be merciful to bless  
With more than these.

Grant us the will to fashion as we feel,  
Grant us the strength to labour as we know,  
Grant us the purpose, ribbed and edged with steel,  
To strike the blow.

Knowledge we ask not—knowledge thou hast lent,  
But Lord, the will—there lies our bitter need,  
Give us to build above the deep intent  
The deed, the deed. (J. Drinkwater.)

## The Second Sunday after the Epiphany

### THE COLLECT

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who dost govern all things in heaven and earth; Mercifully hear the supplications of thy people, and grant us thy peace all the days of our life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

ROMANS 12. 6

### *Christian living*

Through the grace of God we have different gifts. If our gift is preaching, let us preach to the limit of our vision. If it is serving others let us concentrate on our service; if it is teaching let us give all we have to our teaching; and if our gift be the stimulating of the faith of others let us set ourselves to it. Let the man who is called to give, give freely; let the man who wields authority think of his responsibility; and let the man who feels sympathy for his fellows act cheerfully.

Let us have no imitation Christian love. Let us have a genuine

break with evil and a real devotion to good. Let us have real warm affection for one another as between brothers, and a willingness to let the other man have the credit. Let us not allow slackness to spoil our work and let us keep the fires of the spirit burning, as we do our work for the Lord. Base your happiness on your hope in Christ. When trials come endure them patiently; steadfastly maintain the habit of prayer. Give freely to fellow-Christians in want, never grudging a meal or a bed to those who need them. And as for those who try to make your life a misery, bless them. Don't curse, bless. Share the happiness of those who are happy, and the sorrow of those who are sad. Live in harmony with each other. Don't become snobbish but take a real interest in ordinary people.

THE GOSPEL

ST. JOHN 2. I

*Jesus at a wedding-party*

Two days later there was a wedding in the Galilean village of Cana. Jesus' mother was there and he and his disciples were invited to the festivities. Then it happened that the supply of wine gave out, and Jesus' mother told him, "They have no more wine."

"Is that your concern, or mine?" replied Jesus. "My time has not come yet."

So his mother said to the servants, "Mind you do whatever he tells you."

In the room six very large stone water-jars stood on the floor (actually for the Jewish ceremonial cleansing), each holding about twenty gallons. Jesus gave instructions for these jars to be filled with water, and the servants filled them to the brim. Then he said to them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of ceremonies", which they did. When this man tasted the water, which had now become wine, without knowing where it came from (though naturally the servants who had drawn the water knew), he called out to the bridegroom and said to him, "Everybody I know puts his good wine on first and then when



men have had plenty to drink, he brings out the poor stuff. But you have kept back your good wine till now!" Jesus gave this, the first of his signs, at Cana in Galilee. He demonstrated his power and his disciples believed in him.

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### Living in the Light—Christian Behaviour

Today's Gospel is another manifestation of Christ, of his sympathy and ready help in case of need and of his miraculous power over nature (a point also made in the first words of the Collect). But to St. John it is a "sign"; "it sets forth, for him who is willing so to read it, the relation of the old order and the new, of the Law and the Gospel; the latter is seen as the perfecting and transformation of the former" (Lightfoot).

This is what Jesus does; in this way he ever "demonstrates his power". When he comes into life it sparkles like wine; it is no longer drab and uninteresting but exhilarating and exciting, something with a purpose.

\* \* \*

Turning to the Epistle we find set out in it some of the ways in which this new life in Christ can show itself. Those who are filled with the new wine of the Gospel will use their "different gifts" for the benefit of the whole Body of Christ, that is his Church. And all their relationships with other people—both Christian and non-Christian—will be governed by Christian love; the genuine thing, not a play-acting imitation.

So let us love, dear love, like as we ought,  
Love is the lesson which the Lord us taught. (Spenser.)

\* \* \*

Once love has become the driving force in all our relationships, we are justified in praying, as the Collect directs, for peace—that inner peace which springs from a right relationship with God and other people, and which is itself the gift of God, passing all understanding.

## The Third Sunday after the Epiphany

### THE COLLECT

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, mercifully look upon our infirmities, and in all our dangers and necessities stretch forth thy right hand to help and defend us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

ROMANS 12. 16

#### *Overpower evil with good*

Don't become set in your own opinions. Don't pay back a bad turn by a bad turn, to *anyone*. See that your public behaviour is above criticism. As far as your responsibility goes, live at peace with everyone. Never take vengeance into your own hands, my dear friends: stand back and let God punish if he will. For it is written:

Vengeance belongeth unto me: I will recompense.

And these are God's words:

If thine enemy hunger, feed him;

If he thirst, give him to drink:

For in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head.

Don't allow yourself to be overpowered by evil. Take the offensive—overpower evil with good!

### THE GOSPEL

ST. MATTHEW 8. 1

#### *The power of humble faith*

Large crowds followed him when he came down from the hillside. There was a leper who came and knelt in front of him. "Sir," he said, "if you want to, you can make me clean." Jesus stretched out his hand and placed it on the leper saying, "Of course I want to. Be clean!" And at once he was clear of the leprosy.

"Mind you say nothing to anybody," Jesus told him. "Go straight off and show yourself to the priest and make the offering for your recovery that Moses prescribed, as evidence to the authorities."

Then as he was coming into Capernaum a centurion approached. "Sir," he implored him, "my servant is in bed at home paralysed and in dreadful pain."

"I will come and heal him," said Jesus to him.

"Sir," replied the centurion, "I'm not important enough for you to come under my roof. Just give the order, please, and my servant will recover. I'm a man under authority myself, and I have soldiers under me. I can say to one man 'Go' and I know he'll go, or I can say 'Come here' to another and I know he'll come—or I can say to my slave 'Do this' and he'll always do it."

When Jesus heard this, he was astonished. "Believe me," he said to those who were following him, "I have never found faith like this, even in Israel! I tell you that many people will come from East and West and sit at my table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of Heaven. But those who should have belonged to the kingdom will be banished to the darkness outside, where there will be tears and bitter regret."

Then he said to the centurion, "Go home now, and everything will happen as you have believed it will."

And his servant was healed at that actual moment.

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### Living in the Light—Help in Every Need

In the Gospel Christ is shown, in his mercy, restoring a leper and a paralytic to full bodily health. It was something they wanted very much, but could never have gained for themselves, and it was Christ's free gift to them.

In telling this story St. Matthew points to the strong faith shown in Christ, and especially that of the centurion. The point of the centurion's words is this: "I am used to receiving and giving orders and seeing them obeyed; you too need only



give the order, without troubling to come yourself, and you will be obeyed." "I have never found faith like this, even in Israel!" was our Lord's significant comment.

This prompts a sharp reflection. How is it with us Church folk? In our witness to the Light of the world, in our loyalty to the good which he taught, in our trust in the principles which we profess, in our efforts for the welfare of our fellows, are we being put to shame by those who are outside the Church, outside even any Christian body?

Notice how the centurion's faith *led to action*. Something simply had to be done, and once he had made up his mind, he wasted no time.

\* \* \*

The Epistle contains some further advice from St. Paul about Christian behaviour. He sets before us a standard which few but committed Christians are likely to accept, and which even committed Christians can only hope to reach through the power of Christ effectively working within their lives. Indeed, only his living power can heal all those diseases of our souls which distort and spoil our work and witness for the Kingdom of God.

\* \* \*

The Collect is therefore a prayer for help to "live in the Light." "Infirmities, dangers and necessities" all refer mainly to moral failings, dangers and needs, but bodily needs and conditions are included also.

There is mercy for all our infirmities. There is a Father's right hand to help in necessities and defend in dangers. He can and will garrison the inner citadel of every soul—

The hold that falls not when the town is got,

The heart's heart, whose immured plot

Hath keys yourself keep not!

Its keys are at the girdle hung of God;

Its gates are trepidant to his nod;

By him its floors are trod. (Francis Thompson.)

## The Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany

### THE COLLECT

**O** GOD, who knowest us to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers, that by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright; Grant to us such strength and protection, as may support us in all dangers, and carry us through all temptations; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

ROMANS 13. 1

#### *The Christian and the civil law*

Every Christian ought to obey the civil authorities, for all legitimate authority is derived from God's authority, and the existing authority is appointed under God. To oppose authority then is to oppose God, and such opposition is bound to be punished.

The honest citizen has no need to fear the keepers of law and order, but the dishonest man will always be nervous of them. If you want to avoid this anxiety just lead a law-abiding life, and all that can come your way is a word of approval. The officer is God's servant for your protection. But if you are leading a wicked life you have reason to be alarmed. The "power of the law" which is vested in every legitimate officer, is no empty phrase. He is, in fact, divinely appointed to inflict God's punishment upon evil-doers.

You should, therefore, obey the authorities, not simply because it is the safest, but because it is the right thing to do. It is right, too, for you to pay taxes for the civil authorities are appointed by God for the good purposes of public order and well-being. Give everyone his legitimate due, whether it be rates, or taxes, or reverence, or respect!

*Christ's power over "Nature"*

Then he went aboard the boat, and his disciples followed him. Before long a terrific storm sprang up and the boat was awash with the waves. Jesus was sleeping soundly and the disciples went forward and woke him up.

"Lord, save us!" they cried. "We are drowning!"

"What are you so frightened about, you little-faiths?" he replied.

Then he got to his feet and rebuked the wind and the waters and there was a great calm. The men were filled with astonishment and kept saying, "Whatever sort of man is this—why, even the wind and the waves do what he tells them!"

When he arrived on the other side (which is the Gadarenes' country) he was met by two devil-possessed men who came out from among the tombs. They were so violent that nobody dared to use that road.

"What have you got to do with us, Jesus, you Son of God?" they screamed at him. "Have you come to torture us before the proper time?"

It happened that in the distance there was a large herd of pigs feeding. So the devils implored him, "If you throw us out, send us into the herd of pigs!"

"Then go!" said Jesus to them.

And the devils came out of the two men and went into the pigs. Then quite suddenly the whole herd rushed madly down a steep cliff into the lake and were drowned.

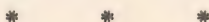
The swineherds took to their heels, and ran to the town. There they poured out the whole story, not forgetting what had happened to the two men who had been devil-possessed. Whereupon the whole town came out to meet Jesus, and as soon as they saw him implored him to leave their territory.



## Living in the Light—Divine Power

The Gospel illustrates Christ's power over nature and more particularly over the spiritual world and the hosts of darkness. It is a difficult story. Belief in evil spirits was common in our Lord's day, and exorcism—driving them out—was (and still is) practised there as elsewhere. It is difficult to say confidently that there are no such things as evil spirits when missionaries and others have borne repeated witness to the reality of the powers of evil. However, we may prefer to describe this "as a vivid picture of delusional insanity told from the standpoint of the contemporary belief in demons" (Rawlinson).

Various explanations, none very satisfactory, have been given of the story of the pigs. Assuming the story to be authentic, we may suppose the pigs to have been frightened by the demoniac, but that tradition connected this, wrongly, with the action of Jesus.



Divine power is also the theme of the Epistle, but here it is shown to be the source of all government authority. "All legitimate authority," says Paul, "is derived from God's authority, and the existing authority is appointed under God." We are to "obey the authorities, not simply because it is the safest, but because it is the right thing to do". Paul wrote against a Roman background. He could see that Roman law stood between the Mediterranean world and complete anarchy. Not only did he number Roman rulers among his friends, but it was precisely Roman law and order that *alone* had made his missionary travels possible.

If today we ask "Must we always obey?", the answer must be "No." The twentieth century has given a harsh reminder that there are times when disobedience and even resistance may be a Christian duty. Yet, broadly speaking, Paul is right; for without obedience to law and order, civilised life—which alone gives men the opportunity to seek the good life—is quite impossible. It is certainly an important part of our Christian duty to follow

Paul's counsel in this matter whenever possible, and to strive to uphold the authority of law in daily life. A Christian should not stand idly by watching a policeman being kicked into unconsciousness by ruffians!

\* \* \*

The Collect is a prayer to the God of all power to support our human weakness with his Divine strength. (Note that in the first sentence the word "always", not in the original Latin Collect and added in 1549, should be omitted. Man can *never* stand upright without Divine strength and protection.)

We pray that he who delivered the disciples from the storm will support us in all dangers, and that he who cast out the evil spirits will carry us through all temptations.

Heavenly Leader, still direct us,  
Still support, console, protect us,  
Till we safely stand  
In our fatherland. (Zinzendorf.)

## The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

### THE COLLECT

**O** LORD, we beseech thee to keep thy Church and household continually in thy true religion; that they who do lean only upon the hope of thy heavenly grace may evermore be defended by thy mighty power; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

### COLOSSIANS 3. 12

#### *Expressing the new life*

As, therefore, God's picked representatives of the new humanity, purified and beloved of God himself, be merciful in action, kindly in heart, humble in mind. Accept life, and be most

patient and tolerant with one another, always ready to forgive if you have a difference with anyone. Forgive as freely as the Lord has forgiven you. And, above everything else, be truly loving, for love is the golden chain of all the virtues. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, remembering that as members of the one body you are called to live in harmony, and never forget to be thankful for what God has done for you.

Let Christ's teaching live in your hearts, making you rich in the true wisdom. Teach and help one another along the right road with your psalms and hymns and Christian songs, singing God's praises with joyful hearts. And whatever work you may have to do, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, thanking God the Father through him.

THE GOSPEL

ST. MATTHEW 13. 24

*Good and evil grow together*

"The kingdom of Heaven," Jesus said, "is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while his men were asleep his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the crop came up and ripened, the weeds appeared as well. Then the owner's servants came up to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where did all these weeds come from?' 'Some blackguard has done this to spite me,' he replied. 'Do you want us then to go out and pull them all up?' said the servants. 'No,' he returned, 'if you pull up the weeds now, you would pull up the wheat with them. Let them both grow together till the harvest. And at harvest-time I shall tell the reapers, 'Collect all the weeds first and tie them up in bundles ready to burn, but collect the wheat and store it in my barn.'"

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Living in the Light—Good and Evil

The Collects, Epistles and Gospels for the later Sundays after the Epiphany are also meant to be used after Trinity 24,



whenever the date of Easter shortens the Epiphany and lengthens the Trinity season. They have therefore an Advent as well as an Epiphany flavour about them. The Gospels chosen leave the epiphanies of the past (the theme of the first four Sundays), to deal with an epiphany of the present (fifth Sunday) and an epiphany of the future (sixth Sunday).

\* \* \*

Today's Gospel story, in so many ways difficult and perplexing, points to the hopeless mix-up of good and bad in individual people, in the Church and in society generally.

Wherever God erects a house of prayer,  
The Devil always builds a chapel there;  
And, 'twill be found, upon examination,  
The latter has the largest congregation. (Daniel Defoe.)

Evil is there amongst us through the action of an enemy—whether this be a personal Devil or our perversion of a God-given liberty. God puts up with it patiently, but this is only for a time; the final separation and destruction of evil is certain.

This is of concern to everyone, but most of all to the family of God—his household, the Church. How the Church needs to be “kept continually in true religion”! (Collect.) It can so easily grow proud, careless and indifferent (“There it is; we can't do anything about it”) and self-satisfied (“We're not doing too badly at our church”).

While then we recognise that evil is there, and that the final judgement is in God's hands, not ours, we also remember that “sowings” and “growings” are a continuous process; good and evil are coming and going all the time. It is our business to regard evil as an hostile growth and to be resolved to be rid of it—“leaning” of course exclusively “upon the hope of God's heavenly grace”. The only way to achieve success in this conflict is never to walk alone but always with him.

\* \* \*

The Epistle sets out true religion in practice. It prompts the

question "Can I measure up to this test? Can 'God's picked representatives'—the church family to which I belong—measure up to it also?" If not, why not?

## The Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany

### THE COLLECT

**O** GOD, whose blessed Son was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil, and make us the sons of God, and heirs of eternal life; Grant us, we beseech thee, that, having this hope, we may purify ourselves, even as he is pure; that, when he shall appear again with power and great glory, we may be made like unto him in his eternal and glorious kingdom; where with thee, O Father, and thee, O Holy Ghost, he liveth and reigneth, ever one God, world without end. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

I ST. JOHN 3. 1

*We are God's children, now—and then!*

Consider the incredible love that the Father has shown us in allowing us to be called "children of God"—and that is not just what we are called, but what we *are*. Our heredity on the Godward side is no mere figure of speech—which explains why the world will no more recognise us than it recognised Christ.

Oh, dear children of mine (forgive the affection of an old man!), have you realised it? Here and now we *are* God's children. We don't know what we shall become in the future. We only know that, if reality were to break through, we should reflect his likeness, for we should see him as he really is!

Everyone who has at heart a hope like that keeps himself pure, for he knows how pure Christ is.

Everyone who commits sin breaks God's law, for that is what sin is, by definition—a breaking of God's law. You know, moreover, that Christ became man for the purpose of removing sin, and that he himself was quite free from sin. The man who

lives "in Christ" does not habitually sin. The regular sinner has never seen or known him. You, my children, are younger than I am, and I don't want you to be taken in by any clever talk just here. The man who lives a consistently good life is a good man, as surely as God is good. But the man whose life is habitually sinful is spiritually a son of the devil, for the devil is behind all sin, as he always has been. Now the Son of God came to earth with the express purpose of liquidating the devil's activities.

THE GOSPEL

ST. MATTHEW 24. 23

*When reality breaks through*

"If anyone says to you then, 'Look, here is Christ!' or 'There he is!' don't believe it. False christs and false prophets are going to appear and will produce great signs and wonders to mislead, if it were possible, even God's own people. Listen, I am warning you. So that if people say to you, 'There he is, in the desert!' you are not to go out there. If they say, 'Here he is, in this inner room!' don't believe it. For as lightning flashes across from east to west so will the Son of Man's coming be. 'Wherever there is a dead body, there the vultures will flock.'

"Immediately after the misery of those days the sun will be darkened, the moon will fail to give her light, the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of heaven will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will wring their hands as they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky in power and great splendour. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet-call and they will gather together his chosen from the four winds—from one end of the heavens to the other."

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Living in the Light—The Final Epiphany

Today's Gospel rounds off the Epiphany season with a description of the last great epiphany of the future. At the end of



time the Son of Man will return. The language is highly coloured and was commonly employed in the writings of our Lord's day, but behind it is the simple fact stated in the Nicene Creed—"He shall come again with glory to judge both the quick (i.e. living) and the dead: Whose kingdom shall have no end."

\* \* \*

The Epistle has links with this, for it speaks of the future as well as the present. Now, through the Father's "incredible love" we *are* the children of God. We don't know about the future except that "if reality were to break through"—that is the final great day at the end of time—"we should reflect his likeness"; be "made like unto him in his eternal and glorious kingdom (Collect).

But, further, like all the Epiphany Epistles, today's selection takes up questions of Christian behaviour. The good life is all-important; sin is sin and must be known for what it is; the "devil's activities" must be "liquidated".

\* \* \*

The Collect, specially composed by Bishop Cosin and added in 1662, gathers up the thought not only of the Sunday but also of the whole Epiphany season. Christ's own epiphanies, made clear in the Sunday Gospels and known from the past, bring a present challenge, which by God's grace we bravely meet—"purifying ourselves even as he is pure"—but they also hold out, as has already been noted, the wonderful promise of a glad epiphany in the future.

THE SUNDAY CALLED  
SEPTUAGESIMA

or the

Third Sunday before Lent

THE COLLECT

**O** LORD, we beseech thee favourably to hear the prayers of thy people; that we, who are justly punished for our offences, may be mercifully delivered by thy goodness, for the glory of thy Name; through Jesus Christ our Saviour, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. *Amen.*

THE EPISTLE

I CORINTHIANS 9. 24

*The necessity for self-discipline*

Do you remember how, on a racing-track, every competitor runs, but only one wins the prize? Well, you ought to run with your minds fixed on winning the prize! Every competitor in athletic events goes into serious training. Athletes will take tremendous pains—for a fading crown of leaves. But our contest is for an eternal crown that will never fade.

I run the race then with determination. I am no shadow-boxer, I really fight! I am my body's sternest master, for fear that when I have preached to others I should myself be disqualified.

THE GOSPEL

ST. MATTHEW 20. 1

*Generosity and jealousy*

“For the kingdom of Heaven is like a farmer going out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. He agreed with them on a wage of a silver coin a day and sent them to work. About nine o'clock he went out and saw some others

standing about in the market-place with nothing to do. 'You go to the vineyard too,' he said to them, 'and I will pay you a fair wage.' And off they went. At about midday and again at about three o'clock in the afternoon he went out and did the same thing. Then about five o'clock he went out and found some others standing about. 'Why are you standing about here all day doing nothing?' he asked them. 'Because no one has employed us,' they replied. 'You go off into the vineyard as well, then,' he said.

"When evening came the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the labourers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last and ending with the first.' So those who were engaged at five o'clock came up and each man received a silver coin. But when the first to be employed came they reckoned they would get more, but they also received a silver coin a man. As they took their money they grumbled at the farmer and said, 'These last fellows have only put in one hour's work and you've treated them exactly the same as us who have gone through all the hard work and heat of the day!'

"But he replied to one of them, 'My friend, I'm not being unjust to you. Wasn't our agreement for a silver coin a day? Take your money and go home. It is my wish to give the late-comer as much as I give you. May I not do what I like with what belongs to me? Must you be jealous because I am generous?'

"So, many who are the last now will be first then and the first last."

---

## God First

There now begins a new section of the Christian Year, centred on Holy Week and Easter. The name given to this Sunday—Septuagesima (seventieth, i.e. about seventy days from Easter) has a forward look. Our thoughts on Sundays from now on are



turned from our Lord's *Coming* to its *Cause*—that human sin from which he came to deliver us.

\* \* \*

The Septuagesima Collect takes this up at once in the words "we who are justly punished for our offences". Anyone who does wrong must expect to take the consequences, and these fall not only on the wrong-doer, but often on a whole lot of other people besides. For instance, when a father gambles away the greater part of his wages, or a son or a daughter is convicted of stealing his or her employer's money, the rest of the family is bound to suffer.

In the petition or asking part of the Collect we pray to be set free from sin (*liberamur* in the ancient Latin Collect), so that we may glorify God's name. In other words, we have to come out of the centre of the picture, and God must go there instead.

\* \* \*

That this is no easy thing to do the Epistle and Gospel clearly demonstrate. The Epistle makes it clear that even a great saint like Paul had to use the strictest self-discipline. The call to self-indulgence was very strong in him as it is in us all. He writes, "I am my body's sternest master." He *just had* to be master of himself if he was to carry out his set purpose of preaching the Gospel, and, by so doing, glorify God's holy name.

\* \* \*

The Gospel parable, no doubt, carries a number of meanings; here it may stand as a tale of *envy*. As the early starters "took their money, they grumbled at the farmer and said, 'These last fellows have only put in one hour's work and you've treated them exactly the same as us who have gone through all the hard work and heat of the day!'" They were jealous because the master was generous. There they were, right in the centre of the picture.

It is as if Jesus said to his hearers, "If you really care about the Kingdom of heaven and God is really in his proper place—

in the centre of the picture where he ought to be, for the Kingdom of heaven is where *God* rules and reigns—you won't mind if some find their way in at the last minute. The only thing that should matter to you is that they have at last found him and have come to glorify his name."

In the Kingdom of heaven the question of equal pay for equal work can never arise; there is none of us but has received far more than he can ever repay. The words of Wordsworth, as he surveyed the glories of King's College Chapel, Cambridge, spring to mind:

Give all thou canst; high Heaven rejects the lore  
Of nicely-calculated less or more.

## THE SUNDAY CALLED SEXAGESIMA

or the

### Second Sunday before Lent

#### THE COLLECT

**O** LORD God, who seest that we put not our trust in anything that we do; Mercifully grant that by thy power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

#### THE EPISTLE

II CORINTHIANS II. 19

*Paul's "boasting"*

From your heights of superior wisdom I am sure you can smile tolerantly on a fool. Oh, you're tolerant all right! You don't mind, do you, if a man takes away your liberty, spends your money, takes advantage of you, puts on airs or even smacks your face? I am almost ashamed to say that I never did brave strong things like that to you. Yet in whatever particular they enjoy such confidence I (speaking as a fool, remember) have just as much confidence.

Are they Hebrews? So am I.

Are they Israelites? So am I.

Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I.

Are they ministers of Christ? I have more claim to this title than they. This is a silly game but look at this list:

I have worked harder than any of them.

I have served more prison sentences!

I have been beaten times without number.

I have faced death again and again.

I have been beaten the regulation thirty-nine stripes by the Jews five times.

I have been beaten with rods three times.

I have been stoned once.

I have been shipwrecked three times.

I have been twenty-four hours in the open sea.

In my travels I have been in constant danger from rivers and floods, from bandits, from my own countrymen, and from pagans. I have faced danger in city streets, danger in the desert, danger on the high seas, danger among false Christians. I have known exhaustion, pain, long vigils, hunger and thirst, doing without meals, cold and lack of clothing.

Apart from all external trials I have the daily burden of responsibility for all the churches. Do you think anyone is weak without my feeling his weakness? Does anyone have his faith upset without my longing to restore him?

Oh, if I am going to boast, let me boast of the things which have shown up my weakness! The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed for ever, knows that I speak the simple truth.

THE GOSPEL

ST. LUKE 8. 4

*The truth meets a mixed reception*

When a large crowd had collected and people were coming to him from one town after another, he spoke to them and gave them this parable:



“A sower went out to sow his seed, and while he was sowing, some of the seed fell by the roadside and was trodden down and the birds gobbled it up. Some fell on the rock, and when it sprouted it withered for lack of moisture. Some fell among thorn-bushes which grew up with the seeds and choked the life out of them. But some seed fell on good soil and grew and produced a crop—a hundred times what had been sown.”

And when he had said this, he called out:

“Let the man who has ears to hear use them!”

Then his disciples asked him the meaning of the parable. To which Jesus replied:

“You have been given the chance to understand the secrets of the kingdom of God, but the others are given parables so that they may go through life with their eyes open and see nothing, and with their ears open, and understand nothing of what they hear.

“This is what the parable means. The seed is the message of God. The seed sown by the roadside represents those who hear the message, and then the devil comes and takes it away from their hearts so that they cannot believe it and be saved. That sown on the rock represents those who accept the message with great delight when they hear it, but have no real root. They believe for a little while but when the time of temptation comes, they lose faith. And the seed sown among the thorns represents the people who hear the message and go on their way, and with the worries and riches and pleasures of living, the life is choked out of them, and in the end they produce nothing. But the seed sown on good soil means the men who hear the message and accept it with a good and honest heart, and go on steadily producing a good crop.”

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### Ourselfs God's Servants

Sexagesima is Latin for “sixtieth”; the Sunday is so called because it is roughly sixty days from Easter.

It is good that Collects should be short, but not so short as to run the risk of being misunderstood. The Sexagesima Collect is an example of this. It begins "O Lord God, who seest that we put not our trust in anything that we do." Is that really how it is? Gregory's original Latin prayer, of which the English Collect is a translation, makes it clear that we ought to add "by our own unaided strength". His words are "*ex nulla nostra actione confidimus*"—that is, we have no confidence in any action that is *purely our own*.

The petition "that by thy power we may be defended against all adversity", needs to have added, "which hinders our serving thee". No true disciple of Jesus Christ asks or expects to be free from the conflicts or sorrows of life, but he does pray to be defended against all that hinders his service of God. We are saved to serve. Two great Scotsmen once met. "Now may God mend all," said one. "Nay, Donald," was the reply, "we must help him to mend it."

(In the original Latin form of the Collect the prayer ran "that by thy power we may be defended against all things that opposed themselves to the teacher of the Gentiles". If this is read in the light of the full epistle of twenty-four verses—see below—it shows that "saved to serve" is the right interpretation.)



The Epistle and Gospel give pictures of the agent of God at work. The Epistle tells how Paul is stung by unkind words into giving a list of some of his more thrilling adventures as he went about spreading the good news of the Gospel. In the service books of Gregory's day the Epistle was longer; it included the first nine verses of chapter 12. No doubt the Reformers felt that an Epistle of twenty-four verses was too long, but in some ways it was a pity they cut it down, as the omitted part tells how Paul came to understand God's decisive role in his life. "My grace is enough for you," God said, "for where there is weakness, my power is shown the more

completely." Here we are back again to the ideas implied in the Collect.

Paul trod no primrose path; for him it was hard going all the time. If ever a man had reason for throwing in his hand, Paul had; but no such thing happened, because he trusted not in his own power but in the power of God.

\* \* \*

In the Gospel God's agent is pictured as a *sower of seed*. It shows how our Lord thought about his work and how all committed Christians should think about theirs. Like Paul, the sower may find his work disappointing and unrewarding, either because he has come across a shut mind ("You might as well talk to a brick wall"); or shallow faith ("I enjoyed the service: I'll come along again some time"); or an overcrowded life ("My dear, I haven't a minute"): but it is wrong to become discouraged; the seed that is sown is not one's own, but (the thought of the Collect is with us still) the *Word of God*.

THE SUNDAY CALLED  
QUINQUAGESIMA  
or the

Next Sunday before Lent

THE COLLECT

**O** LORD, who hast taught us that all our doings without charity are nothing worth; Send thy Holy Ghost, and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of charity, the very bond of peace and of all virtues, without which whosoever liveth is counted dead before thee: Grant this for thine only Son Jesus Christ's sake. *Amen.*



*Love is the highest gift*

If I speak with the eloquence of men and of angels, but have no love, I become no more than blaring brass or crashing cymbal. If I have the gift of foretelling the future and hold in my mind not only all human knowledge but the very secrets of God, and if I also have that absolute faith which can move mountains, but have no love, I amount to nothing at all. If I dispose of all that I possess, yes, even if I give my own body to be burned, but have no love, I achieve precisely nothing.

This love of which I speak is slow to lose patience—it looks for a way of being constructive. It is not possessive: it is neither anxious to impress nor does it cherish inflated ideas of its own importance.

Love has good manners and does not pursue selfish advantage. It is not touchy. It does not keep account of evil or gloat over the wickedness of other people. On the contrary, it is glad with all good men when truth prevails.

Love knows no limit to its endurance, no end to its trust, no fading of its hope; it can outlast anything. It is, in fact, the one thing that still stands when all else has fallen.

For if there are prophecies they will be fulfilled and done with, if there are “tongues” the need for them will disappear, if there is knowledge it will be swallowed up in truth. For our knowledge is always incomplete and our prophecy is always incomplete, and when the complete comes, that is the end of the incomplete.

When I was a little child I talked and felt and thought like a little child. Now that I am a man my childish speech and feeling and thought have no further significance for me.

At present we are men looking at puzzling reflections in a mirror. The time will come when we shall see reality whole and face to face! At present all I know is a little fraction of the truth, but the time will come when I shall know it as fully as God now knows me!

In this life we have three great lasting qualities—faith, hope and love. But the greatest of them is love.

THE GOSPEL

ST. LUKE 18. 31

*The love of Jesus in practice*

Then Jesus took the twelve on one side and spoke to them:

"Listen to me. We are now going up to Jerusalem and everything that has been written by the prophets about the Son of Man will come true. For he will be handed over to the heathen, and he is going to be jeered at and insulted and spat upon, and then they will flog him and kill him. But he will rise again on the third day."

But they did not understand any of this. His words were quite obscure to them and they had no idea of what he meant.

Then, as he was approaching Jericho, it happened that there was a blind man sitting by the roadside, begging. He heard the crowd passing and inquired what it was all about. And they told him, "Jesus the man from Nazareth is going past you." So he shouted out:

"Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me!"

Those who were in front tried to hush his cries. But that made him call out all the more.

"Son of David, have pity on me!"

So Jesus stood quite still and ordered the man to be brought to him. And when he was quite close, he said to him:

"What do you want me to do for you?"

"Lord, make me see again," he cried.

"You can see again! Your faith has cured you," returned Jesus.

And his sight was restored at once, and he followed Jesus, praising God. All the people who saw it thanked God too.

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Love in Christian Service

Quinquagesima is the Latin for fiftieth; it is exactly fifty days to Easter.

Collect: "that most excellent gift of charity." For *charity* read *love* (as in the Epistle). Today "charity" means giving to good causes, and the good causes themselves are often called "charities", but in 1549 it had a wider meaning and expressed the ideal of love as set forward by Jesus.

Unfortunately the word "love", which we must use because there is no other, has its drawbacks too; it can mean one thing on the cinema screen, another in everyday talk, and yet another in church. Loving in our Lord's sense is not simply being fond of things or people, nor is it a sloppy sentiment. It is activity rather than feeling—doing all the good you can, to every one you can, in every way you can. The Epistle sets out what Christian love means. Notice how, in this kind of love, activities are turned away from self towards others and their well-being.

\* \* \*

As Quinquagesima is the Sunday immediately before Lent, the Collect and Epistle may have been chosen with the keeping of Lent in mind. Self-denial, fasting, and all the disciplines of Lent are valuable and important, but they can be obeyed for the wrong reasons. They are only means to an end and that is to help each Christian to live a fuller life and so be better fitted to play his part in building the true Kingdom of God.

\* \* \*

Jesus not only gave his disciples the new commandments of love—love for God and love for all other people—he practised it himself. The Gospel gives two examples of this. It shows him ready "to spend and be spent" for others.



THE FIRST DAY OF LENT  
commonly called

Ash Wednesday

THE COLLECT

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who hatest nothing that thou hast made, and dost forgive the sins of all them that are penitent; Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we worthily lamenting our sins, and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of thee, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

*This Collect is to be read every day in Lent after the Collect appointed for the Day.*

FOR THE EPISTLE

JOEL 2. 12

*A call to true repentance*

Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, weeping and mourning.

Come, not with torn garments but with breaking hearts—come back to the Lord your God! For he is gracious and merciful, slow in anger, rich in love and ever ready to relent. It may be that he will again relent and leave such blessing behind him that you may offer gifts of corn and wine to the Lord your God.

Blow the trumpet in Zion; set a time for fasting.

Call a solemn assembly, and bring the people together.

Assemble the old men, and bring in the children.

Yes, even infants at the breast.

Let the bridegroom leave his house, and the bride her private chamber.

And then let the priests, the ministers of the Lord,

Weep aloud between the Altar and the Porch, crying:  
Spare your people, O Lord!  
Let not your own heritage become a thing to be despised,  
a byword of contempt among the gentiles.  
Why should the nations sneer and say: Where is their God?

THE GOSPEL

ST. MATTHEW 6. 16

*The private life with God*

"Then, when you fast, don't look like those miserable play-actors! For they deliberately disfigure their faces so that people may see that they are fasting. Believe me, they have had all their reward. No, when you fast, brush your hair and wash your face so that nobody knows that you are fasting—let it be a secret between you and your Father. And your Father who knows all secrets will reward you.

"Don't pile up treasures on earth, where moth and rust can spoil them and thieves can break in and steal. But keep your treasure in Heaven where there is neither moth nor rust to spoil it and nobody can break in and steal. For wherever your treasure is, you may be certain that your heart will be there too!"

---

Getting Right with God

The name "Lent" is derived from the Anglo-Saxon "lenc-ten", i.e. spring, the time of the year during which the Church season occurs. Lent has been kept since the seventh century as a forty-day period of fasting and abstinence in preparation for Easter. The connection of the Lenten fast with our Lord's fast in the wilderness was an afterthought. Note that the forty-day period is made up of the weekdays; the six Sundays are excluded and that is why they are Sundays *in* Lent, not Sundays *of* Lent.

\* \* \*

Ash Wednesday took its name from the custom of sprinkling ashes on the heads of priests and people on this day as a mark of their repentance. Though the ashes have gone, repentance and forgiveness remain, and form the theme of the Prayer Book selections.

The Collect, to be used every day in Lent, offers prayer to a God who loves the sinner and is ready to forgive him when he is “penitent”—that is, truly sorry for his sins. The repentance which wins God’s forgiveness has three stages, as shown in the following lines:

Contrition means “I’m sorry,”  
Confession means “I’ll tell”,  
Compensation means “I’ll try  
To make amends as well”.

The first stage is reached when we ask God to “create and make in us new and contrite hearts”. In our Lord’s teaching repentance involves a break with the past and “turning right round”.

Then follows confession—“worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness”—which must come before any seeking of forgiveness; after which we are “to serve and please God in newness of life”. (Note that “remission” and “forgiveness” are two words for the same thing: sin is both a *debt* to be remitted and an *offence* to be forgiven.)

\* \* \*

The Epistle is an Old Testament example of a call to national repentance. The immediate reason for it was a plague of locusts which threatened to destroy every living thing—still a terrifying scourge in tropical countries today. As this was thought to be a mark of God’s displeasure because of their sinful ways, all suffering and national disasters being then held to be punishment for sin, the people were called upon to repent, and to repent sincerely; they had to come “not with torn garments but with breaking hearts”; a fast was commanded and all were to join in praying God to spare their land from further devastation.

\* \* \*



The Gospel is concerned with fasting. In our Lord's day many undertook, in addition to public fasts, voluntary private fasts, and they took care that everyone should know it by going about unwashed and with ashes on their heads. Much of this was "play-acting"—mere ostentatious self-glorification.

"When you fast," said Jesus in effect to his disciples, "keep it dark; let it be a personal matter between you and God alone. It is getting right with him that matters; every kind of self-discipline is only a means to that end. Make God your only treasure."

## The First Sunday in Lent

### THE COLLECT

**O** LORD, who for our sake didst fast forty days and forty nights; Give us grace to use such abstinence, that, our flesh being subdued to the Spirit, we may ever obey thy godly motions in righteousness, and true holiness, to thy honour and glory, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

### II CORINTHIANS 6. 1

#### *Working with God*

As co-operators with God himself we beg you, then, not to fail to use the grace of God. For God's word is—

At an acceptable time I hearkened unto thee,  
And in a day of salvation did I succour thee.

Now *is* the "acceptable time", and this very day *is* the "day of salvation".

As far as we are concerned we do not wish to stand in anyone's way, nor do we wish to bring discredit on the ministry God has given us. Indeed we want to prove ourselves genuine

ministers of God whatever we have to go through—patient endurance of troubles or even disasters, being flogged or imprisoned; being mobbed, having to work like slaves, having to go without food or sleep. All this we want to meet with sincerity, with insight and patience; by sheer kindness and the Holy Spirit; with genuine love, speaking the plain truth, and living by the power of God. Our sole defence, our only weapon, is a life of integrity, whether we meet honour or dishonour, praise or blame. Called “impostors” we must be true, called “nobodies” we must be in the public eye. Never far from death, yet here we are alive, always “going through it” yet never “going under”. We know sorrow, yet our joy is inextinguishable. We have “nothing to bless ourselves with” yet we bless many others with true riches. We are penniless, and yet in reality we have everything worth having.

THE GOSPEL

ST. MATTHEW 4. I

*Jesus himself is tempted*

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit up into the desert, to be tempted by the devil. After a fast of forty days and nights he was very hungry.

“If you really are the Son of God,” said the tempter, coming to him, “tell these stones to turn into loaves.”

Jesus answered, “The scripture says ‘*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God*’.”

Then the devil took him to the holy city, and set him on the highest ledge of the Temple. “If you really are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For the scripture says—

He shall give his angels charge concerning thee:  
And on their hands they shall bear thee up,  
Lest haply thou dash thy foot against a stone.”

“Yes,” retorted Jesus, “and the scripture also says ‘*Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God*’.”

Once again the devil took him to a very high mountain, and from there showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their magnificence. "Everything there I will give you," he said to him, "if you will fall down and worship me."

"Away with you, Satan!" replied Jesus, "the scripture says:

*Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."*

Then the devil let him alone, and angels came to him and took care of him.

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## Self-Discipline

This Sunday's selections are concerned with self-discipline, especially the discipline of bodily needs and desires—"such abstinence that our flesh is subdued to the Spirit". The capital S in Spirit indicates that the Holy Spirit is meant; if so, we are to think of his work in the minds and thoughts of men. But most probably this capital letter is a mistake and the reference is to a disciplined self, in which bodily desires, lusts and passions are kept under close and constant control.

One form of abstinence today is "dieting"; this can be undertaken for reasons of health, but also out of sheer vanity. Another form is the "hunger strike", which *can* be mainly for self-advertisement. But the abstinence mentioned in the Collect has an altogether higher end in view; it is undertaken solely that we may the better obey God's lead ("his godly motions"), do his will ("in righteousness"), and pay him the respect that is his due ("in true holiness")—so that we bring honour and glory to his Name.

\* \* \*

In the Epistle Paul speaks of the hard disciplines of a missionary's life (going without food is only one of them!),



and how he and his fellow-missionaries prove themselves “genuine ministers of God”, “with sincerity, with insight and patience; by sheer kindness and the Holy Spirit; with genuine love, speaking the plain truth, and living by the power of God”. Neither criticism, hardship nor sorrow can turn them from their purpose; theirs is a life of integrity.

But all, Paul adds, whether they are ministers or rank and file Christians, are called to be co-operators with God—to work with him to establish his Kingdom—and they most certainly all need his grace. Here the Collect echoes the Epistle.

\* \* \*

The Gospel shows that the strictest self-discipline will not set us free from temptation; it happened to our Lord and it happens to us. Our Lord faced and mastered the temptation to use three unworthy ways of establishing God’s Kingdom on earth; such temptations come to us and we need God’s grace (Collect) if we are not to let him down. It is all too easy in the circumstances of today to resort to methods of setting forth the Christian Faith which will not bear examination. If the Church’s hands were cleaner, she would be far stronger.

Note, too, that in the fight against temptation our Lord knew his Bible and how to use it. Do you know yours?

## The Second Sunday in Lent

### THE COLLECT

**A**LMIGHTY God, who seest that we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves; Keep us both outwardly in our bodies, and inwardly in our souls; that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

*Purity in living*

To sum up, my brothers, we beg and pray you by the Lord Jesus, that you continue to learn more and more of the life that pleases God, the sort of life we told you about before. You will remember the instructions we gave you then in the name of the Lord Jesus. God's plan is to make you holy, and that entails first of all a clean cut with sexual immorality. Every one of you should learn to control his body, keeping it pure and treating it with respect, and never regarding it as an instrument for self-gratification, as do pagans with no knowledge of God. You cannot break this rule without in some way cheating your fellow-men. And you must remember that God will punish all who do offend in this matter, and we have warned you how we have seen this work out in our experience of life. The calling of God is not to impurity but to the most thorough purity, and anyone who makes light of the matter is not making light of a man's ruling but of God's command. It is not for nothing that the Spirit God gives us is called the *Holy Spirit*.

*A story of persistent faith*

Jesus then left that place and retired into the Tyre and Sidon district. There a Canaanite woman from those parts came to him crying at the top of her voice:

"Lord, have pity on me! My daughter is in a terrible state—a devil has got into her!"

Jesus made no answer, and the disciples came up to him and said, "Do send her away—she's still following us and calling out."

"I was only sent," replied Jesus, "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Then the woman came and knelt at his feet. "Lord, help me," she said.

"It is not right, you know," Jesus replied, "to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

"Yes, Lord, I know, but even the dogs live on the scraps that fall from their master's table!"

"You certainly don't lack faith," returned Jesus, "it shall be as you wish."

And at that moment her daughter was cured.

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### Defence Against Evil (1)

Can evil be mastered? "Yes," says the Prayer Book, echoing Scripture, "but not by ourselves—'we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves'—only through prayer." It is through prayer that God creates and strengthens within us the determination to have done with evil and to carry the warfare through to victory.

In its widest meaning the Collect seems to be concerned with all those ills, whether of body or mind, which beset human life. For instance, prolonged ill-health, or a serious injury and disfigurement in a car smash is an "adversity" which may "happen to the body", possibly destroying one's effectiveness in God's service, and it is right that we should pray that such things should not happen to us. Evil thoughts "assault and hurt the soul", and whatever we do they still come; so it is right to seek divine defence against them.

\* \* \*

But when related to the Epistle, the Collect should perhaps be thought of in a much narrower sense, as a prayer for personal purity. The Epistle, as will be readily seen, deals with the subject of Sex. The sex instinct is *not* evil in itself; when properly used it is a God-given power able to bring about the deepest human happiness. But when it becomes "an instrument for self-gratification" merely to satisfy bodily lusts, it is a sin



against other people, "cheating them", as well as an offence against God.

\* \* \*

The Gospel is best thought of in its place here in the Prayer Book as an acted parable, meant to teach the duty of continual and persistent prayer; and the Gentile woman is the teacher. We learn that the prayer which overcomes evil, whether the evil be outside or inside ourselves, is born of a sunny, loving faith which will not take "no" for an answer.

## The Third Sunday in Lent

### THE COLLECT

WE beseech thee, Almighty God, look upon the hearty desires of thy humble servants, and stretch forth the right hand of thy Majesty, to be our defence against all our enemies; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

EPHESIANS 5. 1

#### *Living in love*

As children copy their fathers you, as God's children, are to copy him. Live your lives in love—the same sort of love which Christ gives us and which he perfectly expressed when he gave himself up for us in sacrifice to God. But as for sexual immorality in all its forms, and the itch to get your hands on what belongs to other people—don't even talk about such things; they are no fit subject for Christians to talk about. The keynote of your conversation should not be nastiness or silliness or flippancy, but a sense of all that we owe to God.

For of this much you can be quite certain: that neither the immoral nor the dirty-minded nor the covetous man (which latter is, in effect, worshipping a false god) has any inheritance

in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Don't let anyone fool you on this point, however plausible his argument. It is these very things which bring down the wrath of God upon the disobedient. Have nothing to do with men like that—once you were “darkness” but now you are “light”. Live then as children of the light. The light produces in men quite the opposite of sins like these—everything that is wholesome and good and true. Let your lives be living proofs of the things which please God. Steer clear of the activities of darkness; let your lives show by contrast how dreary and futile these things are. (You know the sort of things I mean—to detail their secret doings is really too shameful.) For light is capable of “showing up” everything for what it really is. It is even possible (after all, it happened with you!) for light to turn the thing it shines upon into light also. Thus God speaks through the scriptures:

Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead,  
And Christ shall shine upon thee.

THE GOSPEL

ST. LUKE II. 14

*Jesus speaks about evil*

Jesus was expelling an evil spirit which was preventing a man from speaking, and as soon as the evil spirit left him, the dumb man found his speech, to the amazement of the crowds.

But some of them said:

“He expels these spirits because he is in league with Beelzebub, the chief of the evil spirits.”

Others among them, to test him, tried to get a sign from Heaven out of him. But he knew what they were thinking and told them:

“Any kingdom divided against itself is doomed and a dis-united household will collapse. And if Satan disagrees with Satan, how does his kingdom continue?—for I know you are saying that I expel evil spirits because I am in league with Beelzebub. But if I do expel devils because I am an ally of Beelzebub, who is your own sons' ally when they do the same

thing? They can settle that question for you. But if it is by the finger of God that I am expelling evil spirits, *then the kingdom of God has swept over you unawares!*

"When a strong man armed to the teeth guards his own house, his property is in peace. But when a stronger man comes and conquers him, he removes all the arms on which he pinned his faith and divides the spoil among his friends.

"Anyone who is not with me is against me, and the man who does not gather with me is really scattering.

"When the evil spirit comes out of a man, it wanders through waterless places looking for rest, and when it fails to find any, it says, 'I will go back to my house from which I came.' When it arrives, it finds it cleaned and all in order. Then it goes and collects seven other spirits more evil than itself to keep it company, and they all go in and make themselves at home. The last state of that man is worse than the first."

And while he was still saying this, a woman in the crowd called out and said:

"Oh, what a blessing for a woman to have brought you into the world and nursed you!"

But Jesus replied:

"Yes, but a far greater blessing to hear the word of God and obey it."

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## Defence Against Evil (2)

Today's selections take the mastering of evil a stage farther. The key is to be found in our Lord's strange little story of the evil spirit and his seven companions. The eight of them only got into the man's soul (likened here to a house) *because it was empty*. No soul can remain permanently empty, as Isaac Watts well knew when he wrote:

Satan finds some mischief still  
For idle hands to do.



Everyone knows the power of an absorbing interest; wherever people become absorbingly interested in sharing the purposes of God and in carrying out his will, evil is automatically shut out; and as far as those people are concerned *it has been mastered*. This is the only way to do it; we can't get away with making an alliance with evil ("Beelzebub" is the prince of evil spirits—i.e. Satan), nor can we simply remain neutral. "Anyone who is not with me," said Jesus, "is against me."

\* \* \*

Paul is really making the same point in the Epistle. "Live your lives in love—the same sort of love which Christ gives us and which he perfectly expressed when he gave himself up for us in sacrifice to God." In so far as we live up to this, mean, selfish and covetous desires can find no lodging. The one is as different from the other as light is from darkness. True Christian love has all the "expulsive power of a new affection".

\* \* \*

At this point, if we are honest with ourselves, we may wish to recall some other words of Paul: "What I would, that I do not," and we find them true of ourselves. The gap between ideals and attainments is very wide. So the Collect, like that for the second Sunday in Lent, is a prayer to God for defence against the evil which despite all our efforts still finds lodging within. Honestly and humbly in the presence of God we seek his all-powerful aid ("the right hand of his Majesty") in overcoming all our enemies, and especially the temptations of the world, the flesh and the devil.

## The Fourth Sunday in Lent

### THE COLLECT

**G**RANT, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that we, who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished, by the comfort of thy grace may mercifully be relieved; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

GALATIANS 4. 21

*We are sons of freedom*

Now tell me, you who want to be under the Law, have you heard what the Law says?

It is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave and the other by the free woman. The child of the slave was born in the ordinary course of nature, but the child of the free woman was born in accordance with God's promise. This can be regarded as an allegory. Here are the two agreements represented by the two women: the one from Mount Sinai bearing children into slavery, typified by Hagar (Mount Sinai being in Arabia, the land of the descendants of Ishmael, Hagar's son), and corresponding to present-day Jerusalem—for the Jews are still, spiritually speaking, "slaves". But the free woman typifies the heavenly Jerusalem, which is the mother of us all, and spiritually "free". It is written:

Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not;  
Break forth and cry, thou that travailest not:  
For more are the children of the desolate  
Than of her which hath the husband.

Now we, my brothers, are like Isaac, for we are children born "by promise". But just as in those far-off days the natural son persecuted the "spiritual" son, so it is today. Yet what is the scriptural instruction?

Cast out the handmaid and her son:  
For the son of the handmaid shall not inherit  
With the son of the free woman.

So then, my brothers, we are not to look upon ourselves as the sons of the slave woman but of the free, not sons of slavery under the Law but sons of freedom under grace.

Plant your feet firmly therefore within the freedom that Christ has won for us, and do not let yourselves be caught again in the shackles of slavery.

THE GOSPEL

ST. JOHN 6. 1

*Jesus satisfies the hungry*

After this, Jesus crossed the Lake of Galilee (or Tiberias), and a great crowd followed him because they had seen the signs which he gave in his dealings with the sick. But Jesus went up the hillside and sat down there with his disciples. The Passover, the Jewish festival, was near. So Jesus, raising his eyes and seeing a great crowd on their way towards him, said to Philip, "Where can we buy food for these people to eat?" (He said this to test Philip, for he himself knew what he was going to do.)

"Ten pounds' worth of bread would not be enough for them," Philip replied, "even if they had only a little each."

Then Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, another disciple, put in, "There is a boy here who has five small barley loaves and a couple of fish, but what's the good of that for such a crowd?"

Then Jesus said, "Get the people to sit down."

There was plenty of grass there, and the men, some five thousand of them, sat down. Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks for them and distributed them to the people sitting on the grass, and he distributed the fish in the same way, giving them as much as they wanted. When they had eaten enough, Jesus said to his disciples, "Collect the pieces that are left over so that nothing is wasted."

So they did as he suggested and filled twelve baskets with the



broken pieces of the five barley loaves, which were left over after the people had eaten! When the men saw this sign of Jesus' power, they kept saying, "This certainly is the Prophet who was to come into the world!"

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### Deliverance from Evil

The fourth Sunday in Lent is sometimes called *Refreshment Sunday*, a title probably suggested by the Gospel; sometimes *Mothering Sunday*, an ancient description of uncertain origin. In France it is *Mi-Carême*, i.e. Mid-Lent Sunday, when feasts often provide a welcome relief from Lenten austerities.

The Sunday teaching now turns from sin and the need for repentance towards the gift of pardon through the sacrifice and death of Jesus, and this remains the leading idea during the rest of Lent. The Collect recognises the justice of punishment for wrong-doing and the evil men bring upon themselves and ask that by God's mercy and through his strengthening grace they may be set free. As we sow, we reap; evil produces only evil, and we are caught up in a chain of evil consequences and cannot free ourselves. Only God can do this, coming in from outside, as he did in the Person of Jesus Christ.

\* \* \*

The close-knit argument of the Epistle leads to the same conclusion; "we are sons of freedom under grace" and "are to plant our feet firmly within the freedom that Christ has won for us".

Briefly the argument is this. In the Genesis story (in chapters 16-21) Hagar, the slave and mistress, along with her son Ishmael, was turned out by Abraham when Sarah his wife gave birth to Isaac "in accordance with God's promise". This story, declares Paul, is an allegory; that is, it contains a deeper spiritual meaning, and illustrates God's two agreements or covenants, the old and the new. The *old* agreement (represented

by Hagar the *slave* and Ishmael, set out in the books of the Jewish Law and kept in being in the Jerusalem of Paul's day) was all right while it was in force; but when God's promise was fulfilled (represented by Isaac born to Sarah the *free woman*) a *new* agreement was set up and the old had to go. This new agreement has come about through Jesus Christ, and his grace has brought freedom and a new relationship with God—that of sons rather than slaves.

This is not the sort of argument which appeals to us today, nor is it one which we should want to use, but we can appreciate Paul's point. Those who have accepted Christ are "not sons of slavery under the Law, but sons of freedom under grace".

\* \* \*

God's grace—his free and inexhaustible bounty—is further emphasised in the Gospel. St John tells over again the miracle of the feeding of the multitude, in spite of its being in each of the three earlier Gospels, because by means of it he wants to explain the teaching of our Lord about himself as the Bread of life. There is little doubt that the early Christians associated the feeding of the multitude with Holy Communion. They knew, as we know, that when week by week "that holy bread, that food unpriced" is blessed and broken and distributed to the faithful, there is still more than enough of Heavenly Food for all who come in penitence and faith to receive it.

## The Fifth Sunday in Lent

### THE COLLECT

WE beseech thee, Almighty God, mercifully to look upon thy people; that by thy great goodness they may be governed and preserved evermore, both in body and soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

*The old agreement and the new*

For now Christ has come among us, the High Priest of the good things which were to come, and has passed through a greater and more perfect tent which no human hand had made (for it was no part of this world of ours). It was not with goats' or calves' blood but with his own blood that he entered once and for all into the Holy of Holies, having won for us men eternal reconciliation with God. And if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a burnt heifer were, when sprinkled on the unholy, sufficient to make the body pure, then how much more will the blood of Christ himself, who in his eternal spirit offered himself to God as the perfect sacrifice, purify our souls from the deeds of death, that we may serve the living God!

Christ is consequently the administrator of an entirely new agreement, having the power, by virtue of his death, to redeem transgressions committed under the first agreement: to enable those who obey God's call to enjoy the promises of the eternal inheritance.

*Jesus declares himself*

"Which of you can prove me guilty of sin? If I am speaking the truth, why is it that you do not believe me? The man who is born of God can hear the words of God and the reason why you cannot hear the words of God is simply this, that you are not the sons of God."

"How right we are," retorted the Jews, "in calling you a Samaritan, and mad at that!"

"No," replied Jesus, "I am not mad. I am honouring my Father and you are trying to dishonour me. But I am not concerned with my own glory: there is one whose concern it is, and he is the true judge. Believe me when I tell you that if anybody accepts my words, he will never see death at all."



"Now we know that you're mad," replied the Jews. "Why, Abraham died and the prophets, too, and yet you say, 'If a man accepts my words, he will never experience death!' Are you greater than our father, Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets—who are you making yourself out to be?"

"If I were trying to glorify myself," returned Jesus, "such glory would be worthless. But it is my Father who glorifies me, the very one whom you say is your God—though you have never known him. But I know him, and if I said I did not know him, I should be as much a liar as you are! But I do know him and I am faithful to what he says. As for your father, Abraham, his great joy was that he would see my coming. Now he has seen it and he is overjoyed."

"Look," said the Jews to him, "you are not fifty yet—and has Abraham seen you?"

"I tell you in solemn truth," returned Jesus, "before there was an Abraham, I AM!"

At this, they picked up stones to hurl at him, but Jesus disappeared and made his way out of the Temple.

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## The Conquest of Evil

The fifth Sunday in Lent is widely known as *Passion Sunday* because "on this day our Lord began to make open prediction of his coming sufferings" (Blunt). From now to Good Friday the Cross becomes central in the Church's teaching.

The royal banners forward go  
The Cross shines forth in mystic glow;  
Where he in flesh, our flesh who made,  
Our sentence bore, our ransom paid. (Venantius Fortunatus.)

The Epistle is concerned with our Lord's sacrifice upon the cross, through which has been won for us "eternal reconciliation with God".

The author of Hebrews is here contrasting the old agreement (the Law) and the new agreement (Christianity, the Gospel). Under the old, there was a tent or tabernacle, which was the dwelling-place of God, and in which the High Priest offered sacrifices as the Law required. But now, under the new agreement, Christ himself is the High Priest; he enters "a greater and more perfect tent which no human hand has made", the inner sanctuary which is God's presence. Instead of offering in sacrifice the blood of animals, he offers his own.

Further, if under the old agreement the blood of animals had value, what of the blood of Christ, the spotless victim, whose sacrifice was his own free act? This blood has power to cleanse "all who obey God's call" from the "deeds of death", so making possible a living service to a living God.

Jesus Christ, alone of all men perfect in character and life, was able to offer to God a life perfectly devoted and consecrated to God's will. He was able to do this because he was completely in union with God and therefore stronger than evil. Because he was fully human, he could act as our representative—in our name, and God could accept his perfect life as a token of our full repudiation of sin and consecration to good.

\* \* \*

The Gospel gives a glimpse of the misunderstanding and opposition of the Jews to Jesus which finally brought about his crucifixion. This makes it a suitable choice for the beginning of Passion-tide. But it was chosen also because it makes clear our Lord's own claim to be the Messiah, the divine Christ. "Before there was an Abraham," he said, "I AM." Being who he is, he is able to do for men all that is claimed for him in the Epistle—to free them from a yoke from which they could never have freed themselves.

\* \* \*

The Collect, at first sight, seems to have little to do with the theme of the day. The connection is implicit rather than explicit. In the prayer we ask God to look upon his people,

or better, his household (the original Latin Collect has *familiam*); that is, all those who believe Christ to be the Son of God and who trust in his redeeming blood. As by his sacrifice evil is conquered and a new life becomes possible, it is right (and very necessary) that we should pray continually to be kept in the right way and to be helped to overcome all evil in ourselves.

## The Sunday next before Easter

### THE COLLECT

**A**LMIGHTY and everlasting God, who, of thy tender love towards mankind, hast sent thy Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, to take upon him our flesh, and to suffer death upon the cross, that all mankind should follow the example of his great humility; Mercifully grant, that we may both follow the example of his patience, and also be made partakers of his resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

### PHILIPPIANS 2. 5

#### *Christ's humility*

Let Christ Jesus be your example as to what your attitude should be. For he, who had always been God by nature, did not cling to his prerogatives as God's equal, but stripped himself of all privilege by consenting to be a slave by nature and being born as mortal man. And, having become man, he humbled himself by living a life of utter obedience, even to the extent of dying, *and the death he died was the death of a common criminal.* That is why God has now lifted him so high, and has given him the name beyond all names, so that at the name of Jesus "every knee shall bow", whether in Heaven or earth or under the earth. And that is why, in the end, "every tongue shall confess" that Jesus Christ is the Lord, to the glory of God the Father.



*The trial and death of Jesus*

When the morning came, all the chief priests and elders of the people met in council to decide how they could get Jesus executed. Then they marched him off with his hands tied, and handed him over to Pilate the governor.

Then Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that he was condemned and in his remorse returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and elders, with the words, "I was wrong—I have betrayed an innocent man to death."

"And what has that got to do with us?" they replied. "That's your affair."

And Judas flung down the silver in the Temple and went outside and hanged himself. But the chief priests picked up the money and said, "It is not legal to put this into the Temple treasury. It is, after all, blood-money." So, after a further consultation, they purchased with it the Potter's Field to be a burial-ground for foreigners, which is why it is called "the Field of Blood" to this day. And so the words of Jeremiah the prophet came true:

And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was priced, whom certain of the children of Israel did price; and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me.

Meanwhile Jesus stood in front of the governor, who asked him, "Well, you—*are* you the King of the Jews?"

"Yes, I am," replied Jesus.

But while the chief priests and elders were making their accusations, he made no reply at all. So Pilate said to him, "Can you not hear the evidence they're bringing against you?" And to the governor's amazement, Jesus did not answer a single one of their accusations.

Now it was the custom at festival-time for the governor to release any prisoner whom the people chose. And it happened that at this time they had a notorious prisoner called Barabbas.

So when they assembled to make their usual request, Pilate said to them, "Which one do you want me to set free, Barabbas or Jesus called Christ?" For he knew very well that the latter had been handed over to him through sheer malice. And indeed while he was actually sitting on the Bench his wife sent a message to him—"Don't have anything to do with that good man! I went through agonies dreaming about him last night!" But the chief priests and elders persuaded the mob to ask for Barabbas and demand Jesus' execution. Then the governor spoke to them, "Which of these two are you asking me to release?"

"Barabbas!" they cried.

"Then what am I to do with Jesus who is called Christ?" asked Pilate.

"Have him crucified!" they all cried. At this Pilate said, "Why, what is his crime?" But their voices rose to a roar, "Have him crucified!" When Pilate realised that nothing more could be done but that there would soon be a riot, he took a bowl of water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I take no responsibility for the death of this man. You must see to that yourselves." To this the whole crowd replied, "Let his blood be on us and on our children!" Whereupon Pilate released Barabbas for them, but he had Jesus flogged and handed over for crucifixion.

Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the governor's palace and collected the whole guard around him. There they stripped him and put a scarlet cloak upon him. They twisted some thorn-twigs into a crown and put it on his head and put a stick into his right hand. They bowed low before him and jeered at him with the words, "Hail, your majesty, king of the Jews!" Then they spat on him, took the stick and hit him on the head with it. And when they had finished their fun, they stripped the cloak off again, put his own clothes upon him and led him off for crucifixion. On their way out of the city they met a man called Simon, a native of Cyrene in Africa, and they compelled him to carry Jesus' cross.

Then when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Skull Hill) they offered him a drink of wine mixed with some bitter drug, but when he had tasted it he refused to drink. And when they had nailed him to the cross they shared out his clothes by drawing lots.

Then they sat down to keep guard over him. And over his head they put a placard with the charge against him:

### THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS

Now two bandits were crucified with Jesus at the same time, one on either side of him. The passers-by nodded their heads knowingly and called out to him in mockery, "Hi, you who could pull down the Temple and build it up again in three days—why don't you save yourself? If you are the Son of God, step down from the cross!" The chief priests also joined the scribes and elders in jeering at him, saying, "He saved others, but he can't save himself! If this is the king of Israel, why doesn't he come down from the cross now, and we will believe him! He trusted in God . . . let God rescue him if He will have anything to do with him! For he said, 'I am God's son'." Even the bandits who were crucified with him hurled abuse at him.

Then from midday until three o'clock darkness spread over the whole countryside, and then Jesus cried with a loud voice, "My God, my God, why did you forsake me?" Some of those who were standing there heard these words which Jesus spoke in Aramaic (*Eli, Eli lama sabachthani?*), and said, "This man is calling for Elijah!" And one of them ran off and fetched a sponge, soaked it in vinegar and put it on a long stick and held it up for him to drink. But the others said, "Let him alone! Let's see if Elijah will come and save him." But Jesus gave one more great cry, and died.

And the sanctuary curtain in the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The ground shook, rocks split and graves were opened. (A number of bodies of holy men who were asleep in death rose again. They left their graves after Jesus' resurrection and entered the holy city and appeared to many



people.) When the centurion and his company who were keeping guard over Jesus saw the earthquake and all that was happening they were terrified. "Indeed he *was* a son of God!" they said.

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## The Cross

This Sunday is universally known as *Palm Sunday*, because it is the anniversary of our Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, "when the people went out to meet him with palm branches in their hands". It is also the first day of Holy Week, and, as happens in each of the days which follow, the story of the Passion is read as the Gospel: according to St. Matthew on Palm Sunday; according to St. Mark on the Monday and Tuesday; according to St. Luke on the Wednesday and Thursday; and according to St. John on Good Friday.

\* \* \*

The Cross is the symbol of Christianity and is central in its teaching. There can be no Christianity without the Cross. On Passion Sunday the Church turns our attention to what Christ upon the Cross has done *for us* (see the notes there). Now on Palm Sunday we are taken a stage farther; for what he has done *for us* is also to be done *within us*. The Cross is not only the means of our salvation, but also the pattern for Christian living. Note the first words of the Epistle. "Let Christ himself be your example as to what your attitude (to life) should be." God's "tender love" in Christ and our response to it are both to be in mind as we read again, day by day, the solemn Gospel narratives. And we may recall that every time we share in the blessed Sacrament it is "that we may evermore dwell in him and he in us"; his life is to be our life, his way our way, his pattern our pattern.

\* \* \*

The Collect for Palm Sunday and Holy Week may fitly be thought of along with the Palm Sunday Epistle which largely

inspired it. In the Epistle Paul tries to picture the self-sacrifice, the self-emptying, the self-giving of God in Christ's taking "upon him our flesh, and suffering death upon the cross." Prerogatives were abandoned; God "stripped himself of all privilege", and "the death he died was the death of a common criminal". We pray in the Collect to copy, however feebly, his sacrificial, self-denying love ("the example of his great humility").

This will call for patience, which in its turn will involve suffering and endurance. The St. Matthew Passion has examples enough of all three. But this is not all. We look forward to sharing Christ's exaltation as well as his sufferings, and so we pray to be "partakers of his resurrection". In this way God's loving purpose is fulfilled; "for God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him should not be lost, but should have eternal life".

## Monday before Easter

FOR THE EPISTLE

ISAIAH 63. I

### *Judgement and Salvation*

Who is this, arrived from Edom, all brightly coloured from  
Bozrah;  
Dressed in splendour, and striding in the greatness of his  
strength?

It is I, I who speak of deliverance and am strong enough to save!

Why, then, is there red on your cloak, on your very clothes,  
As though you were some treader of the winepress?

I have trodden the winepress alone—  
No man from any nation was with me.  
I trod them down in my anger,  
And trampled them in my fury.

It was their blood which splashed my garments,  
And all my clothes are stained with it.  
For I had resolved upon a day of vengeance,  
And the time to redeem had come.  
I looked, there was none to help,  
I was weak, there was none to sustain me.  
But my own power won me the victory,  
And my own fury supplied my strength.  
I trampled the nations in my wrath,  
I made them insensible in my fury.  
I poured out their blood like wine upon the earth.  
I will tell of the love of the Lord,  
I will praise the kindnesses of the Lord—  
For all the Lord's dealing with us,  
For all his goodness to the house of Israel,  
Which he gave them out of his mercy,  
And the abundant store of his love.

For he said, Surely they are my people,  
Sons who will never deceive me;  
And he became their Saviour.  
In all their affliction he did them no harm,  
And he saved them because he was there himself to save.  
In his love and in his pity he rescued them.  
It was he who lifted them and carried them through all the days  
of old.  
But it was they who rebelled against him, and grieved his holy  
Spirit,  
So that he turned from them to become their enemy,  
And he himself fought against them.  
Then he remembered the days of old,  
The days of Moses, and of his people.  
Where is he who brought the shepherds of his flock safely  
through the sea?  
Where is he who put his holy Spirit in their midst,  
Who gave his own glorious power to Moses,



Dividing the waters before them,  
And making for himself a name that will never be forgotten?  
Who led them through the depths without stumbling,  
Like horses running over the plain,  
Or cattle moving down into the valley?  
The Spirit of the Lord guided them;  
So did you lead your people,  
And make for yourself a glorious name!

Look down from Heaven, look down from your glorious and  
holy dwelling!  
Where is your jealous care and your strength?  
Your compassion and your pity are hidden from me now.

You are our Father,  
Though Abraham does not know us,  
And Israel will not acknowledge us.  
You, O Lord, are our Father:  
Your name from days of old is our Redeemer.  
O Lord, why do you leave us to wander from your ways?  
And harden our hearts till we cease to fear you?  
Come back for the sake of your servants,  
For the sake of the tribes who are your own inheritance.  
Your holy people occupied your sanctuary for a little while,  
And now our enemies have trodden it underfoot.  
We have become like people whom you have never ruled,  
Like those who have never borne your name.

THE GOSPEL

ST. MARK 14. 1

*The last hours of Jesus' life*

In two days' time the festival of the Passover and of unleavened bread was due. Consequently, the chief priests and the scribes were trying to think of some trick by which they could get Jesus into their power and have him executed.

"But it must not be during the festival," they said, "or there will be a riot."

Jesus himself was now in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper. As he was sitting at table, a woman approached him with an alabaster flask of very costly spikenard perfume. She broke the neck of the flask and poured the perfume on Jesus' head. Some of those present were highly indignant and muttered:

"What is the point of such wicked waste of perfume? It could have been sold for over thirty pounds and the money could have been given to the poor." And there was a murmur of resentment against her. But Jesus said:

"Let her alone, why must you make her feel uncomfortable? She has done a beautiful thing for me. You have the poor with you always and you can do good to them whenever you like, but you will not always have me. She has done all she could—for she has anointed my body in preparation for burial. I assure you that wherever the Gospel is preached throughout the whole world, this deed of hers will also be recounted, as her memorial to me."

Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went off to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. And when they heard what he had to say, they were delighted and undertook to pay him for it. So he looked out for a convenient opportunity to betray him.

On the first day of unleavened bread, the day when the Passover was sacrificed, Jesus' disciples said:

"Where do you want us to go and make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?"

Jesus sent off two of them with these instructions:

"Go into the town and you will meet a man carrying a pitcher of water. Follow him and say to the owner of the house to which he goes, 'The master says, where is the room for me to eat the Passover with my disciples?' And he will show you a large upstairs room all ready with the furnishings that we need. That is the place where you are to make our preparations."

So the disciples set off and went into the town, found everything as he had told them, and prepared for the Passover.

Late in the evening he arrived with the twelve. And while they

were sitting there, right in the middle of the meal, Jesus remarked:

"Believe me, one of you is going to betray me—someone who is now having his supper with me."

This shocked and distressed them and one after another they began to say to him:

"Surely, I'm not the one?"

"It is one of the twelve," Jesus told them, "a man who is dipping his hand into the dish with me. It is true that the Son of Man will follow the road foretold by the scriptures, but alas for the man through whom he is betrayed! It would be better for that man if he had never been born."

And while they were still eating Jesus took a loaf, blessed it and broke it and gave it to them, with the words:

"Take this, it is my body."

Then he took a cup, and after thanking God, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it, and he said to them:

"This is my blood which is shed for many in the new agreement. I tell you truly I will drink no more wine until the day comes when I drink it fresh in the kingdom of God!"

Then they sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives.

"Every one of you will lose your faith in me," Jesus told them, "as the scripture says:

I will smite the shepherd,

And the sheep shall be scattered abroad.

Yet after I have risen, I shall go before you into Galilee!"

Then Peter said to him:

"Even if every one should lose his faith, I never will."

"Believe me, Peter," returned Jesus, "this very night before the cock crows twice, you will disown me three times."

But Peter protested violently:

"Even if it means dying with you, I will never disown you!"

And they all made the same protest.

Then they arrived at a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples:



"Sit down here while I pray."

He took with him Peter, James and John, and began to be horror-stricken and desperately depressed.

"My heart is nearly breaking," he told them. "Stay here and keep watch for me."

Then he walked forward a little way and flung himself on the ground, praying that, if it were possible, he might not have to face the ordeal.

"Dear Father," he said, "all things are possible to you. Please—let me not have to drink this cup! Yet it is not what I want but what you want."

Then he came and found them fast asleep. He spoke to Peter. "Are you asleep, Simon? Couldn't you manage to watch for a single hour? Watch and pray, all of you, that you may not have to face temptation. Your spirit is willing, but human nature is weak."

Then he went away again and prayed in the same words, and once more he came and found them asleep. They could not keep their eyes open and they did not know what to say for themselves. When he came back for the third time, he said:

"Are you still going to sleep and take your ease? All right—the moment has come; now you are going to see the Son of Man betrayed into the hands of evil men! Get up, let us be going! Look, here comes my betrayer!"

And indeed, while the words were still on his lips, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived with a mob armed with swords and staves, sent by the chief priests and scribes and elders. The betrayer had given them a sign; he had said, "The one I kiss will be the man. Get hold of him and you can take him away without any trouble." So he walked straight up to Jesus, cried, "Master!" and kissed him affectionately. And so they got hold of him and held him. Somebody present drew his sword and struck at the High Priest's servant, slashing off his ear. Then Jesus spoke to them:

"So you've come out with your swords and staves to capture me like a bandit, have you? Day after day I was with you in the

Temple, teaching, and you never laid a finger on me. But the scriptures must be fulfilled."

Then all the disciples deserted him and made their escape. There happened to be a young man among Jesus' followers who wore nothing but a linen shirt. They seized him, but he left the shirt in their hands and took to his heels stark naked.

So they marched Jesus away to the High Priest in whose presence all the chief priests and elders and scribes had assembled. (Peter followed him at a safe distance, right up to the High Priest's courtyard. There he sat in the firelight with the servants, keeping himself warm.) Meanwhile, the chief priests and the whole council were trying to find some evidence against Jesus which would warrant the death penalty. But they failed completely. There were plenty of people ready to give false testimony against him, but their evidence was contradictory. Then some more perjurers stood up and said:

"We heard him say, 'I will destroy this Temple that was built by human hands and in three days I will build another made without human aid.'"

But even so their evidence conflicted. So the High Priest himself got up and took the centre of the floor.

"Have you no answer to make?" he asked Jesus. "What about all this evidence against you?"

But Jesus remained silent and offered no reply. Again the High Priest asked him:

"Are you Christ, Son of the blessed one?"

And Jesus said:

"I am! Yes, you will all see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, coming in the clouds of heaven."

Then the High Priest tore his robes and cried:

"Why do we still need witnesses? You heard the blasphemy; what is your opinion now?"

And their verdict was that he deserved to die. Then some of them began to spit at him. They blindfolded him and then slapped him, saying:

"Now prophesy who hit you!"

Even the servants who took him away slapped his face.

In the meantime, while Peter was in the courtyard below, one of the High Priest's maids came and saw him warming himself. She looked closely at him, and said:

"You were with the Nazarene too—with Jesus!"

But he denied it, saying:

"I don't understand. I don't know what you're talking about."

And he walked out into the gateway, and a cock crew.

Again the maid who had noticed him began to say to the men standing there:

"This man is one of them!"

But he denied it again. A few minutes later the bystanders themselves said to Peter:

"You certainly are one of them. Why, you're a Galilean!"

But he started to curse and swear:

"I tell you I don't know the man you're talking about!"

Immediately the cock crew for the second time, and back into Peter's mind came the words of Jesus, "Before the cock crows twice, you will disown me three times."

And he broke down and wept.

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The chapter from Isaiah chosen for the Epistle falls into three parts. In the first—cast in dialogue form, the poet sees God approaching as a mighty warrior in blood-splashed garments. Note that the blood referred to is not that of God himself, but that of his enemies whom he has trodden down and crushed because of their oppression of his people. It is thus not the shedding of the Saviour's blood but the idea of judgement which links this first section with Holy Week.

Next follows a recital of God's kindnesses to his people in earlier times—cast in the form familiar to us in the psalms. "I will tell of the love of the Lord," of "all his goodness to the house of Israel." The poet recalls that God said "Surely they



are my people, sons who will never deceive me"; and also that this did not turn out to be true—"they rebelled against him and grieved his holy Spirit". Then the wonderful past days of the Exodus are recalled and the great deliverance under Moses. "So did you lead your people," the prophet tells God, "and make for yourself a glorious name."

Finally the prophet cries for light; God's compassion and pity are hidden from him. He cannot understand why God leaves men to wander from his ways and hardens their hearts till they cease to fear him. So he prays to God the Redeemer of old that he may return for his people's sake and show them his power once more. It is here that the links with Holy Week are closest. *The Redeemer indeed has come*; but the ancient pattern proves to be the same—hearts are hardened, and God is repudiated or ignored.

When Jesus came to Golgotha  
They hanged him on a tree;  
They drove great nails through hands and feet  
And made a Calvary. . . .

When Jesus came to Birmingham  
They simply passed him by;  
They never hurt a hair of him,  
They merely let him die. . . .

The crowds went home and left the streets  
Without a soul to see;  
And Jesus crouched beside a wall  
And cried for Calvary. (G. A. Studdert Kennedy.)

## Tuesday before Easter

THE EPISTLE

ISAIAH 50. 4

### *Suffering in a righteous cause*

The Lord God has made me understand,  
And I have not rebelled  
Nor have I sought to escape.  
I offered my back to those who beat me,  
And my cheeks to those who tore at my beard.  
I did not hide my face from their shameful spitting,  
For the Lord God will help me, and I shall not be ashamed.  
That is why I have set my face like flint,  
And know that I cannot be humiliated.  
My defender is near at hand—  
Who will dare to challenge me?  
Let us take our stand together—  
Who is my attacker? Let him approach me.  
See, the Lord God helps me! Who will condemn me?  
Look, all of them will wear out like clothing;  
The moths will eat them up!

Whoever among you fears the Lord, and listens to his servant's  
voice,  
Whoever is walking in darkness and has no light,  
Let him trust in the name of the Lord,  
And rest in confidence upon his God!  
But you who kindle strife, who set your world ablaze,  
Walk by the light of your own fire, by the fire-brands you have  
kindled,  
This shall be my gift to you: you shall lie down in torment.

THE GOSPEL

ST. MARK 15. 1

### *Jesus is crucified*

The moment daylight came the chief priests called together a  
meeting of elders, scribes and members of the whole council,

bound Jesus and took him off and handed him over to Pilate. Pilate asked him straight out:

"Well, you—*are* you the king of the Jews?"

"Yes, I am," he replied.

The chief priests brought many accusations. So Pilate questioned him again:

"Have you nothing to say? Listen to all their accusations!"

But Jesus made no further answer—to Pilate's astonishment.

Now it was Pilate's custom at festival-time to release a prisoner—anyone they asked for. There was in the prison at the time, with some other rioters who had committed murder in a recent outbreak, a man called Barabbas. The crowd surged forward and began to demand that Pilate should do what he usually did for them. So he spoke to them:

"Do you want me to set free the king of the Jews for you?"

For he knew perfectly well that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him through sheer malice. But the chief priests worked upon the crowd to get them to demand Barabbas' release instead. So Pilate addressed them once more:

"Then what am I to do with the man whom you call the king of the Jews?"

They shouted back,

"Crucify him!"

But Pilate replied:

"Why, what crime has he committed?"

But their voices rose to a roar:

"Crucify him!"

And as Pilate wanted to satisfy the crowd, he set Barabbas free for them, and after having Jesus flogged handed him over to be crucified.

Then the soldiers marched him away inside the courtyard of the governor's residence and called their whole company together. They dressed Jesus in a purple robe, and twisting some thorn-twigs into a crown, they put it on his head. Then they began to greet him:

"Hail, your majesty—king of the Jews!"



They hit him on the head with a stick and spat at him, and then bowed low before him on bended knee. And when they had finished their fun with him, they took off the purple cloak and dressed him again in his own clothes. Then they led him outside to crucify him. They compelled Simon, a native of Cyrene in Africa (the father of Alexander and Rufus), who was on his way from the fields at the time, to carry Jesus' cross.

They took him to a place called Golgotha (which means Skull Hill) and they offered him some drugged wine, but he would not take it. Then they crucified him, and shared out his garments, drawing lots to see what each of them would get. It was about nine o'clock in the morning when they nailed him to the cross. Over his head the placard of his crime read, "THE KING OF THE JEWS". They also crucified two bandits at the same time, one on each side of him. And the passers-by jeered at him, shaking their heads in mockery, saying:

"Hi, you! You could destroy the Temple and build it up again in three days, why not come down from the cross and save yourself?"

The chief priests also made fun of him among themselves and the scribes, and said:

"He saved others, he cannot save himself. If only this Christ, the king of Israel, would come down now from the cross, we should see it and believe!"

And even the men who were crucified with him hurled abuse at him.

At midday darkness spread over the whole countryside and lasted until three o'clock in the afternoon, and at three o'clock Jesus cried out in a loud voice,

"My God, my God, why did you forsake me?"

Some of the bystanders heard these words which Jesus spoke in Aramaic (*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*), and said:

"Listen, he's calling for Elijah!"

One man ran off and soaked a sponge in vinegar, put it on a stick, and held it up for Jesus to drink, calling out:

"Let him alone! Let's see if Elijah will come and take him down!"

But Jesus let out a great cry, and died. The curtain of the Temple sanctuary was split in two from the top to the bottom. And when the centurion who stood in front of Jesus saw how he died, he said:

"This man was certainly a son of God!"

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The Epistle is taken from the writings of the Second Isaiah, an unknown prophet who lived during the Jewish Exile, and is the third of four short poems or "songs" found there about a Servant of God. The other poems—the Servant's task, the preparation of the Servant and the exaltation of the Servant will be found in Chs. 42. 1-4; 49. 1-6; and 53. 1-12 respectively. This third poem may be called "The Servant's Confidence in God". The speaker is the Servant himself; originally he may have stood for the nation, Israel, or some harshly treated prophet like Jeremiah, for instance. Jesus saw in the portrait of the suffering Servant the vocation that was his, and he fulfilled these inspired prophecies as no one else could have done. The early Christian writers laid emphasis on this, seeing in the Servant songs prophecies of Christ's innocent sufferings.

The final sentences (from "whoever among you" onwards) are not part of the song, but a comment upon it added later by someone who wanted to encourage the persecuted and warn the persecutor. God is eternal and the last word is with him: for the persecuted, therefore, the way through darkness into light is that of complete trust in God; the destiny of the persecutors, on the other hand, is to be destroyed by the very fires they themselves have set ablaze.

## The Wednesday before Easter

THE EPISTLE

JEWISH CHRISTIANS 9. 16

*Christ has power to administer the new agreement*

For, as in the case of a will, the agreement is only valid after death. While the testator lives, a will has no legal power. And indeed we find that even the first agreement of God's will was not put into force without the shedding of blood. For when Moses had told the people every command of the Law he took calves' and goats' blood with water and scarlet wool, and sprinkled both the book and all the people with a sprig of hyssop, saying: "This is the blood of the agreement God makes with you." Moses also sprinkled with blood the tent itself and all the sacred vessels. And you will find that in the Law almost all cleansing is made by means of blood—as the common saying has it: "No shedding of blood, no remission of sin."

It was necessary for the earthly reproductions of heavenly realities to be purified by such methods, but the actual heavenly things could only be made pure in God's sight by higher sacrifices than these. Christ did not therefore enter into any holy places made by human hands (however truly these may represent heavenly realities), but he entered Heaven itself to make his appearance before God as High Priest on our behalf. There is no intention that he should offer himself regularly, like the High Priest entering the holy of holies every year with the blood of another creature. For that would mean that he would have to suffer death every time he entered Heaven from the beginning of the world! No, the fact is that now, at this point in time, the end of the present age, he has appeared once and for all to abolish sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as surely as it is appointed for all men to die once, and after that pass to their judgement, so it is certain that Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many and after that, to those who look for him, he will appear a second time, not this time to deal with sin, but to bring to full salvation those who eagerly await him.



*Jesus faces the end*

Now as the feast of unleavened bread, called the Passover, was approaching, fear of the people made the chief priests and scribes try desperately to find a way of getting rid of Jesus. Then a diabolical plan came into the mind of Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve. He went and discussed with the chief priests and officers a method of getting Jesus into their hands. They were delighted and arranged to pay him for it. He agreed, and began to look for a suitable opportunity for betrayal when there was no crowd present.

Then the day of unleavened bread arrived, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed, and Jesus sent off Peter and John with the words, "Go and make all the preparations for us to eat the Passover."

"Where would you like us to do this?" they asked.

And he replied:

"Listen, just as you're going into the city a man carrying a jug of water will meet you. Follow him to the house he is making for. Then say to the owner of the house, 'The master has this message for you—which is the room where my disciples and I may eat the Passover?' And he will take you upstairs and show you a large room furnished for our needs. Make all the preparations there."

So they went off and found everything exactly as he had told them it would be, and they made the Passover preparations.

Then, when the time came, he took his seat at table with the apostles, and spoke to them,

"With all my heart I have longed to eat this Passover with you before the time comes for me to suffer. Believe me, I shall not eat the Passover again until all that it means is fulfilled in the kingdom of God."

Then taking a cup from them, he thanked God and said:

"Take this and share it amongst yourselves, for I tell you that I shall drink no more wine until the kingdom of God comes."

Then he took a loaf and after thanking God he broke it and gave it to them, with these words,

"This is my body which is given for you: do this in remembrance of me."

So too, he gave them a cup after supper with the words:

"This cup is the new agreement made in my own blood which is shed for you. Yet the hand of the man who is betraying me lies with mine at this moment on the table. The Son of Man goes on his appointed way: yet alas for the man by whom he is betrayed!"

And at this they began to debate among themselves as to which of them would do this thing.

And then a dispute arose among them as to who should be considered the most important.

But Jesus said to them:

"Among the heathen it is their kings who lord it over them, and their rulers are given the title of 'benefactors'. But it must not be so with you! *Your* greatest man must become like a junior and your leader must be a servant. Who is the greater, the man who sits down to dinner or the man who serves him? Obviously, the man who sits down to dinner—yet *I* am the one who is the servant among you. But you are the men who have stood by me in all that I have gone through, and as surely as my Father has given me my kingdom, so I give you the right to eat and drink at my table in that kingdom. Yes, you will sit on thrones and rule the twelve tribes of Israel!

"Oh, Simon, Simon do you know that Satan has asked to have you all to sift like wheat?—But I have prayed for *you* that you may not lose your faith. Yes, when you have turned back to me, you must strengthen these brothers of yours."

Peter said to him:

"Lord, I am ready to go to prison, or even to die with you!"

"I tell you, Peter," returned Jesus, "before the cock crows today you will deny three times that you know me!"

Then he continued to them all:

"That time when I sent you out without any purse or wallet or shoes—did you find you needed anything?"

"No, not a thing," they replied.

"But now," Jesus continued, "if you have a purse or wallet, take it with you, and if you have no sword, sell your coat and buy one! For I tell you that this scripture must be fulfilled in me—

And he was reckoned with transgressors.

So comes the end of what they wrote about me."

Then the disciples said:

"Lord, look, here are two swords."

And Jesus returned:

"That is enough."

Then he went out of the city and up on to the Mount of Olives, as he had often done before, with the disciples following him. And when he reached his usual place, he said to them:

"Pray that you may not have to face temptation!"

Then he went off by himself, about a stone's throw away, and falling on his knees, prayed in these words—

"Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me—but it is not my will, but yours, that must be done."

And an angel from Heaven appeared, strengthening him. He was in agony and prayed even more intensely so that his sweat was like great drops of blood falling to the ground. Then he got to his feet from his prayer and walking back to the disciples, he found them sleeping through sheer grief.

"Why are you sleeping?" he said to them. "You must get up and go on praying that you may not have to face temptation."

While he was still speaking a crowd of people arrived, led by the man called Judas, one of the twelve. He stepped up to Jesus to kiss him.

"Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?" said Jesus to him.

And the disciples, seeing what was going to happen, cried:

"Lord, shall we use our swords?"



And one of them did slash at the High Priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. But Jesus retorted:

"That will do!"

And he touched his ear and healed him. Then he spoke to the chief priests, Temple officers and elders who were there to arrest him:

"So you have come out with your swords and staves as if I were a bandit. Day after day I was with you in the Temple and you never laid a finger on me—but this is your hour and the power of darkness is yours!"

Then they arrested him and marched him off to the High Priest's house. Peter followed at a distance, and sat down among some people who had lighted a fire in the middle of the courtyard and were sitting round it. A maidservant saw him sitting there in the firelight, peered into his face and said:

"This man was with him too."

But he denied it and said:

"I don't know him, girl!"

A few minutes later someone else noticed Peter, and said:

"You're one of these men too."

But Peter said:

"Man, I am not!"

Then about an hour later someone else insisted:

"I am convinced this fellow was with him. Why, he is a Galilean!"

"Man," returned Peter, "I don't know what you're talking about."

And immediately, while he was still speaking, the cock crew. The Lord turned his head and looked straight at Peter, and into his mind flashed the words that the Lord had said to him . . . "You will disown me three times before the cock crows today." And he went outside and wept bitterly.

Then the men who held Jesus made a great game of knocking him about. And they blindfolded him and asked him:

"Now, prophet, guess who hit you that time!"

And that was only the beginning of the way they insulted him.

Then when daylight came, the assembly of the elders of the people, which included both chief priests and scribes, met and marched him off to their own council. There they asked him:

"If you really are Christ, tell us!"

"If I tell you, you will never believe me, and if I ask you a question, you will not answer me. But from now on the Son of Man will take his seat at the right hand of almighty God."

Then they all said:

"So you are the Son of God then?"

"You are right; I am," Jesus told them.

Then they said:

"Why do we need to call any more witnesses, for we ourselves have heard this thing from his own lips?"

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Today's Epistle, first chosen in 1549, follows on the passage from Hebrews chosen for Passion Sunday. See the notes there.

The teaching of the whole chapter may be summed up as follows. First, *under the old agreement or covenant*, (1) the Aaronic priest (2) once a year (3) entered the holy of holies and (4) offered the blood of another. Secondly, *under the new agreement or covenant* (1) the true High Priest our Lord (2) once for all (3) entered the sanctuary of heaven (4) to appear before God and to offer himself.

By our Lord's death the new agreement or covenant becomes operative. He has "abolished sin by the sacrifice of himself," and "it is certain that . . . to those who look for him, he will appear a second time, not this time to deal with sin, but to bring to full salvation those who eagerly await him."

## Thursday before Easter

THE EPISTLE

I CORINTHIANS II. 17

### *Careless communion means spiritual weakness*

In giving you the following rules, I cannot commend your conduct, for it seems that your church meetings do you more harm than good! For first, when you meet for worship I hear that you split up into small groups, and I think there must be truth in what I hear. For there must be cliques among you or your favourite leaders would not be so conspicuous. It follows, then, that when you are assembled in one place you do not eat the *Lord's* supper. For everyone tries to grab his food before anyone else, with the result that one goes hungry and another has too much to drink! Haven't you houses of your own to have your meals in, or are you making a convenience of the church of God and causing acute embarrassment to those who have no other home?

Am I to commend this sort of conduct? Most certainly not!

The teaching I gave you was given me personally by the Lord himself, and it was this: the Lord Jesus, in the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread and when he had given thanks he broke it and said, "Take, eat, this is my body which is being broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me." Similarly, when supper was ended, he took the cup saying, "This cup is the new agreement in my blood: do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

This can only mean that whenever you eat this bread or drink of this cup, you are proclaiming that the Lord has died for you, and you will do that until he comes again. So that, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord without proper reverence is sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.

No, a man should thoroughly examine himself, and only then should he eat the bread or drink of the cup. He that eats and drinks carelessly is eating and drinking a judgement on himself, for he is blind to the presence of the Lord's body.



It is this careless participation which is the reason for the many feeble and sickly Christians in your church, and the explanation of the fact that many of you are spiritually asleep.

If we were closely to examine ourselves beforehand, we should avoid the judgement of God. But when God does judge us, he disciplines us as his own sons, that we may not be involved in the general condemnation of the world.

Now, my brothers, when you come together to eat this bread, wait your proper turn. If a man is really hungry let him satisfy his appetite at home. Don't let your communions be God's judgement upon you!

The other matters I will settle in person, when I come.

THE GOSPEL

ST. LUKE 23. I

*Jesus and final evil*

Then they rose up in a body and took him off to Pilate, and began their accusation in these words:

"Here is this man whom we have found corrupting our people, and telling them that it is wrong to pay taxes to Caesar, claiming that he himself is Christ, a king."

But Pilate addressed his question to Jesus:

"Are you the king of the Jews?"

"Yes, I am," he replied.

Then Pilate spoke to the chief priests and the crowd:

"I find nothing criminal about this man."

But they pressed their charge, saying:

"He's a trouble-maker among the people. He teaches through the whole of Judaea, all the way from Galilee to this place."

When Pilate heard this, he inquired whether the man were a Galilean, and when he discovered that he came under Herod's jurisdiction, he passed him on to Herod who happened to be in Jerusalem at that time. When Herod saw Jesus, he was delighted, for he had been wanting to see him for a long time. He had heard a lot about Jesus and was hoping to see him perform a miracle. He questioned him very thoroughly, but Jesus gave

him absolutely no reply, though the chief priests and scribes stood there making the most violent accusations. So Herod joined his own soldiers in scoffing and jeering at Jesus. Finally, they dressed him up in a gorgeous cloak, and sent him back to Pilate. On that day Herod and Pilate became firm friends, though previously they had been at daggers drawn.

Then Pilate summoned the chief priests, the officials and the people and addressed them in these words,

"You have brought this man to me as a mischief-maker among the people, and I want you all to realise that, after examining him in your presence, I have found nothing criminal about him, in spite of all your accusations. And neither has Herod, for he has sent him back to us. Obviously, then, he has done nothing to deserve the death penalty. I propose, therefore, to teach him a sharp lesson and let him go."

But they all yelled as one man:

"Take this man away! We want Barabbas set free!"

(Barabbas was a man who had been put in prison for causing a riot in the city and for murder.) But Pilate wanted to set Jesus free and he called out to them again, but they shouted back at him:

"Crucify, crucify him!"

Then he spoke to them, for the third time:

"What is his crime, then? I have found nothing in him that deserves execution; I am going to teach him his lesson and let him go."

But they shouted him down, yelling their demand that he should be crucified.

Their shouting won the day, and Pilate pronounced the official decision that their request should be granted. He released the man for whom they asked, the man who had been imprisoned for rioting and murder, and surrendered Jesus to their demands.

And as they were marching him away, they caught hold of Simon, a native of Cyrene in Africa, who was on his way home from the fields, and put the cross on his back for him to carry behind Jesus.

A huge crowd of people followed him, including women who wrung their hands and wept for him. But Jesus turned to them and said:

"Women of Jerusalem, do not shed your tears for me, but for yourselves and for your children! For the days are coming when men will say, 'Lucky are the women who are childless—the bodies which have never borne, and the breasts which have never given nourishment.' Then men will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall upon us!' and will say to the hills, 'Cover us up!' For if this is what men do when the wood is green, what will they do when it is seasoned?"

Two criminals were also led out with him for execution, and when they came to the place called The Skull, they crucified him with the criminals, one on either side of him. But Jesus himself was saying:

"Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing."

Then they shared out his clothes by casting lots.

The people stood and stared while their rulers continued to scoff, saying, "He saved other people, let's see him save himself, if he is really God's Christ—his chosen!"

The soldiers also mocked him by coming up and presenting sour wine to him, saying:

"If you are the king of the Jews, why not save yourself?" For there was a placard over his head which read:

"THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS."

One of the criminals hanging there covered him with abuse, and said:

"Aren't you Christ? Why don't you save yourself—and us?"

But the other one checked him with the words:

"Aren't you afraid of God even when you're getting the same punishment as he is? And it's fair enough for us, for we've only got what we deserve, but this man never did anything wrong in his life."

Then he said:

"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."



And Jesus answered:

"I tell you truly, this very day you will be with me in paradise."

It was now about midday, but darkness came over the whole countryside until three in the afternoon, for there was an eclipse of the sun. The veil in the Temple sanctuary was split in two. Then Jesus gave a great cry and said:

"Father, I commend my spirit into your hands."

And with these words, he died.

When the centurion saw what had happened, he exclaimed reverently:

"That was indeed a good man!"

And the whole crowd who had collected for the spectacle, when they saw what had happened, went home in deep distress. And those who had known him, as well as the women who had followed him from Galilee, remained standing at a distance and saw all this happen.

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The Epistle for this day—known as Maundy Thursday—gives Paul's account of the first Lord's Supper. It is the earliest account we have and bears out the hints given in the Acts of the Apostles that the sacrament was part of the Church's life from the very beginning. This account also shows that at first "the breaking of bread" took place at the Agape or love-feast—an ordinary social meal at which all the Christians gathered together.

At Corinth, serious faults had developed, resulting from cliquishness and greed, which created anything but the right atmosphere for the Lord's Supper. Paul points out what a serious matter it is to be a partaker, involving proper preparation and proper behaviour.

As time went on the social meal and the Eucharist were separated. Today in many parishes they are being brought close together again by means of the parish breakfast after the parish Communion. This is surely a good thing and Paul would have commended it; but would he be equally happy to find different bodies of Christians unable to kneel side by side at the

same Lord's table? It is surely tragic that Christians are most divided where they should be most united!

## Good Friday

### THE COLLECTS

**A**LMIGHTY God, we beseech thee graciously to behold this thy family, for which our Lord Jesus Christ was contented to be betrayed, and given up into the hands of wicked men, and to suffer death upon the cross, who now liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. *Amen.*

**A**LMIGHTY and everlasting God, by whose Spirit the whole body of the Church is governed and sanctified; Receive our supplications and prayers, which we offer before thee for all estates of men in thy holy Church, that every member of the same, in his vocation and ministry, may truly and godly serve thee; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

**O**MERCIFUL God, who hast made all men, and hatest nothing that thou hast made, nor wouldest the death of a sinner, but rather that he should be converted and live; Have mercy upon all Jews, Turks, Infidels, and Hereticks, and take from them all ignorance, hardness of heart, and contempt of thy Word; and so fetch them home, blessed Lord, to thy flock, that they may be saved among the remnant of the true Israelites, and be made one fold under one shepherd, Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

*(The Collect below as found in the 1928 Prayer Book)*

**O**MERCIFUL God, who hast made all men, and hatest nothing that thou hast made, nor wouldest the death of a sinner, but rather that he should be converted and live: Have mercy upon thine ancient people the Jews, and upon all who

have not known thee, or who deny the faith of Christ crucified; take from them all ignorance, hardness of heart, and contempt of thy Word; and so fetch them home, blessed Lord, to thy fold, that they may be made one flock under one shepherd, Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

THE EPISTLE

JEWISH CHRISTIANS 10. I

*The sacrifice of Christ is perfect*

The Law possessed only a dim outline of the benefits Christ would bring and did not actually reproduce them. Consequently it was incapable of perfecting the souls of those who offered their regular annual sacrifices. For if it had, surely the sacrifices would have been discontinued—on the grounds that the worshippers, having been really cleansed, would have had no further consciousness of sin. In practice, however, the sacrifices amounted to an annual reminder of sins; for the blood of bulls and goats cannot really remove the guilt of sin.

Therefore, when Christ enters the world, he says:

Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not,  
But a body didst thou prepare for me;  
In whole burnt offering and sacrifices for sin thou hadst no  
pleasure:  
Then said I, Lo, I am come  
(In the roll of the book it is written of me)  
To do thy will, O God.

After saying that God has “no pleasure in sacrifice, offering and burnt-offering” (which are made according to the Law), Christ then says, “Lo, I am come to do thy will.” That means that he is dispensing with the old order of sacrifices, and establishing a new order of obedience to the will of God, and in that will we have been made holy by the single unique offering of the body of Jesus Christ.

Every human priest stands day by day performing his religious duties and offering time after time the same sacrifices



—which can never actually remove sins. But this man, after offering one sacrifice for sins for ever, took his seat at God's right hand, from that time offering no more sacrifice, but waiting until "his enemies be made his footstool". For by virtue of that one offering he has perfected for all time every one whom he makes holy. The Holy Spirit himself endorses this truth for us, when he says, first:

This is the covenant that I will make with them  
After those days, saith the Lord;  
I will put my laws on their heart,  
And upon their mind also will I write them.

And then, he adds:

And their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.

Where God grants remission of sin there can be no question of making further atonement.

So, by virtue of the blood of Jesus, you and I, my brothers, may now have confidence to enter the Holy of Holies by a fresh and living way, which he has opened up for us by himself passing through the curtain, that is, his own human nature. Further, since we have a great High Priest set over the household of God, let us draw near with true hearts and fullest confidence, knowing that our inmost souls have been purified by the sprinkling of his blood just as our bodies are cleansed by the washing of clean water. In this confidence let us hold on to the hope that we profess without the slightest hesitation—for he is utterly dependable—and let us think of one another and how we can encourage each other to love and do good deeds. And let us not hold aloof from our church meetings, as some do. Let us do all we can to help one another's faith, and this the more earnestly as we see the final day drawing ever nearer.

THE GOSPEL

ST. JOHN 19. 1

*The sacrifice of the cross*

Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged, and the soldiers twisted

thorn-twigs into a crown and put it on his head, threw a purple robe around him and kept coming into his presence, saying, "Hail, king of the Jews!" And then they slapped him with their open hands.

Then Pilate went outside again and said to them, "Look, I bring him out before you here, to show that I find nothing criminal about him at all."

And at this Jesus came outside too, wearing the thorn crown and the purple robe.

"Look," said Pilate, "here's the man!"

The sight of him made the chief priests and Jewish officials shout at the top of their voices, "Crucify! Crucify!"

"You take him and crucify him," retorted Pilate. "He's no criminal as far as I can see!"

The Jews answered him, "We have a Law, and according to that Law, he must die, for he made himself out to be Son of God!"

When Pilate heard them say this, he became much more uneasy, and returned to the palace again and spoke to Jesus, "Where *do* you come from?"

But Jesus gave him no reply. So Pilate said to him, "Won't you speak to me? Don't you realise that I have the power to set you free, and I have the power to have you crucified?"

"You have no power at all against me," replied Jesus, "except what was given to you from above. And for that reason the one who handed me over to you is even more guilty than you are."

From that moment, Pilate tried hard to set him free but the Jews were shouting, "If you set this man free, you are no friend of Caesar! Anyone who makes himself out to be a king is anti-Caesar!"

When Pilate heard this, he led Jesus outside and sat down upon the Judgement-seat in the place called the Pavement (in Hebrew, Gabbatha). It was the preparation day of the Passover and it was now getting on towards midday. Pilate now said to the Jews "Look, here's your king!"

At which they yelled, "Take him away, take him away, crucify him!"

"Am I to crucify your king?" Pilate asked them.

"Caesar is our king and no one else," replied the chief priests. And at this Pilate handed Jesus over to them for crucifixion.

So they took Jesus and he went out carrying the cross himself, to a place called Skull Hill (in Hebrew, Golgotha). There they crucified him, and two others, one on either side of him with Jesus in the middle. Pilate had a placard written out and put on the cross, reading:

"JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS."

This placard was read by many of the Jews because the place where Jesus was crucified was quite near Jerusalem, and it was written in Hebrew as well as in Latin and Greek. So the chief priests said to Pilate, "You should not write 'The King of the Jews', but 'This man said, I am King of the Jews'."

To which Pilate retorted, "Indeed? What I have written, I have written."

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they divided his clothes between them, taking a quarter-share each. There remained his shirt, which was seamless—woven in one piece from the top to the bottom. So they said to each other, "Don't let us tear it; let's draw lots and see who gets it."

This happened to fulfil the scripture which says:

They parted my garments among them,  
And upon my vesture did they cast lots.

While the soldiers were doing this, Jesus' mother was standing near the cross with her sister, and with them Mary, the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing by her side, and said to her, "Look, there is your son!" And then he said to the disciple, "And there is your mother!"

And from that time the disciple took Mary into his own home.



After this, Jesus realising that everything was now completed, said (fulfilling the saying of scripture), "I am thirsty."

There was a bowl of sour wine standing there. So they soaked a sponge in the wine, put it on a spear, and pushed it up towards his mouth. When Jesus had taken it, he cried, "It is finished!" his head fell forward, and he died.

As it was the day of preparation for the Passover, the Jews wanted to avoid the bodies being left on the crosses over the Sabbath (for that was a particularly important Sabbath), and they requested Pilate to have the men's legs broken and the bodies removed. So the soldiers went and broke the legs of the first man and of the other who was crucified with Jesus. But when they came to him, they saw that he was dead already and they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there was an outrush of blood and water. And the man who saw this is our witness: his evidence is true. (He is certain that he is speaking the truth, so that you may believe as well.) For this happened to fulfil the scripture,

A bone of him shall not be broken.

And again another scripture says:

They shall look on him whom they pierced.

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## The Sacrifice of the Cross

The Epistle takes up once again the theme of Passion Sunday and the Wednesday in Holy Week. The reader is referred to the notes under those two days.

Jesus is the one "full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world". Under the Jewish Law sacrifices had to be repeatedly offered. Our Lord, however, made the old order obsolete by offering the perfect sacrifice on the Cross once for all. There is now "no question of making further atonement". Through Christ, and "by his one oblation of himself once offered", we have direct

access to God; we “have confidence to enter the Holy of Holies”; we draw near with *faith* in God, “with true hearts and fullest confidence”; with *hope* too, because “he is utterly dependable”; and with *love* for others, which means among other things, not “holding aloof from our church meetings!”

\* \* \*

There are three Collects for Good Friday. Note:

*was contented to*—the Latin is “non dubitavit”, did not hesitate;

*all estates of men*—all kinds of men;

*vocation and ministry*—calling and service;

*Turks*—Mohammedans, the Turks being the chief Moslem power known in the sixteenth century;

*Infidels*—unbelievers of all kinds;

*Hereticks*—those who, while professing to be Christians, are believed not to hold the true Catholic Faith;

*remnant of the true Israelites*—Christians making up the Church, the new Israel.

In the first Collect we plead Christ’s sacrifice on behalf of the entire Church, the family of God. (Perhaps *this* in “this thy family” points to the congregation present—a small section of the whole.)

In the second we pray not only for the whole body, but for every degree, section and member of it, that all may obey their calling and perform their due service.

In the third—the only direct missionary prayer in the *Book of Common Prayer*—we intercede for those outside the Church. “Jews, Turks, Infidels and Hereticks” are mentioned as representing four great groups of non-Christians. The prayer is then for those believed to be in various degrees of error: for the Jews and Mohammedans who worship God but not in Christ; for the infidels or unbelievers who worship him not at all; and for the hereticks who worship him amiss—that they all may be brought to know, love and serve God in Christ.

This prayer has been rewritten in the 1928 Prayer Book in a

form more suitable for twentieth-century use, though all the original basic ideas of the earlier prayer remain.

\* \* \*

The Gospel completes the Passion narratives. St. John's account is most suitable for use on Good Friday as bringing out the *sacrificial* aspects of the death of Jesus, and its challenge to every Christian.

So, the All-Great, were the All-Loving too—  
So, through the thunder comes a human voice  
Saying, "O heart I made, a heart beats here!  
Face, my hands fashioned, see it in myself.  
Thou hast no power nor may'st conceive of mine,  
But love I gave thee, with myself to love,  
And thou must love me who have died for thee!"

(Browning.)

## Easter Even

### THE COLLECT

**G**RANT, O Lord, that as we are baptised into the death of thy blessed Son our Saviour Jesus Christ, so by continual mortifying our corrupt affections we may be buried with him; and that through the grave, and gate of death, we may pass to our joyful resurrection; for his merits, who died, and was buried, and rose again for us, thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord.  
*Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

### I ST. PETER 3. 17

#### *The power of Christ's suffering*

If it is the will of God that you should suffer it is really better to suffer unjustly than because you have deserved it. Remember that Christ the just suffered for us the unjust, to bring us to God. That meant the death of his body, but he came to life again in the spirit. It was in the spirit that he went and preached to the



imprisoned souls of those who had been disobedient in the days of Noah—the days of God's great patience during the period of the building of the ark, in which eventually only eight souls were saved in the flood. And I cannot help pointing out what a perfect illustration this is of the way you have been admitted to the safety of the Christian "ark" by baptism, which means, of course, far more than the mere washing of a dirty body: it means the ability to face God with a clear conscience. For there is in every true baptism the virtue of Christ's rising from the dead. And he has now entered Heaven and is at God's right hand, with all angels, authorities and powers subservient to him.

THE GOSPEL

ST. MATTHEW 27. 57

*The body of Jesus is placed in the tomb*

That evening, Joseph, a wealthy man from Arimathaea, who was himself a disciple of Jesus, went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave orders for the body to be handed over to him. So Joseph took it, wrapped it in clean linen and placed it in his own new tomb which had been hewn in the rock. Then he rolled a large stone across the doorway of the tomb and went away. But Mary from Magdala and the other Mary remained there, sitting in front of the tomb.

Next day, which was the day after the Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees went in a body to Pilate and said, "Sir, we have remembered that while this impostor was alive, he said, 'After three days I shall rise again.' Will you give the order then to have the grave closely guarded until the third day, so that there can be no chance of his disciples' coming and stealing the body and telling people that he has risen from the dead? We should then be faced with a worse fraud than the first one."

"You have a guard," Pilate told them. "Go and make it as safe as you think necessary." And they went and made the grave secure, putting a seal on the stone and leaving the soldiers on guard.

## Identification of Ourselves with Christ through Baptism

The Gospel for the final day of Holy Week gives St. Matthew's account of what happened between our Lord's burial and resurrection. The Epistle—selected for the first Prayer Book of 1549—was no doubt chosen for the same reason. His body died, declared Peter, “but he came to life again in the Spirit . . . and went and preached to the imprisoned souls of those who had been disobedient in the days of Noah”. Compare “He descended into hell”—hell here meaning the place of departed spirits.

Many have found the passage difficult and much has been written about it. We are faced here with a great mystery, but so long as Jesus is accepted as universal Saviour we may not set any limits to his saving activity.

\* \* \*

The Holy Week theme—identification of ourselves with the way of the Cross, the dedication of ourselves to a life of sacrifice and service—is continued in both Epistle and Collect. Of this life Baptism is the outward and visible sign. Baptism means “far more than the mere washing of a dirty body: it means the ability to face God with a clear conscience. For there is in every true baptism the virtue of Christ's rising from the dead”.

Baptism means identification with Christ at every stage, as the Collect implies. We are “baptised into his death”, that is into fellowship with Christ who died for us; we try to “mortify corrupt affections”, that is to put our corrupt nature to death by nailing it to the Cross of Christ: so we gain courage to pray that “through the grave, and gate of death, we may pass to our joyful resurrection; for his merits who died, and was buried, and rose again for us”.

The references to baptism in these selections were intentional. In earlier times Easter was one of the chief times for public baptism. Those to be baptised were prepared during

Lent, and put on white garments called "chrisoms" as a sign of having "put on" Christ in their baptism.

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The complete identification with the life, thoughts and purposes of our Lord, brought before us here, may seem far beyond us; but it is right nevertheless to pray for it, pleading his merits, and remembering also that

A man's reach should exceed his grasp  
Or what's a heaven for?        (Browning.)

## Easter Day

*At Morning Prayer, instead of the Psalm. O come, let us, &c.  
these Anthems shall be sung or said.*

CHRIST our passover is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast;

Not with the old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness: but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. 1 Corinthians 5. 7

Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more : death hath no more dominion over him.

For in that he died, he died unto sin once : but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God.

Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin: but alive unto God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Romans 6. 9

Christ is risen from the dead : and become the first-fruits of them that slept.

For since by man came death : by man came also the resurrection of the dead.

For as in Adam all die : even so in Christ shall all be made alive. 1 Corinthians 15. 20



Glory be to the Father, and to the Son: and to the Holy Ghost;  
*Answer.* As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be :  
world without end. *Amen.*

We Christians have had a Passover lamb sacrificed for us—none other than Christ himself! So let us “keep the feast” with no trace of the yeast of the old life, nor the yeast of vice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of unadulterated truth! 1 Corinthians 5. 7.

We can be sure that the risen Christ never dies again—death’s power to touch him is finished. He died, because of sin, once: he lives for God for ever. In the same way look upon yourselves as dead to the appeal and power of sin but alive and sensitive to the call of God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Romans 6. 9.

But the glorious fact is that Christ *did* rise from the dead: he has become the very first to rise of all who sleep the sleep of death. As death entered the world through a man, so has rising from the dead come to us through a man! As members of a sinful race all men die; as members of the Christ of God all men shall be raised to life. 1 Corinthians 15. 20.

#### THE COLLECT

**A**LMIGHTY God, who through thine only-begotten Son Jesus Christ hast overcome death, and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life; We humbly beseech thee, that, as by thy special grace preventing us thou dost put into our minds good desires, so by thy continual help we may bring the same to good effect; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. *Amen.*

#### THE EPISTLE

#### COLOSSIANS 3. 1

#### *Living the new life*

If you are then “risen” with Christ, reach out for the highest gifts of Heaven, where Christ reigns in power. Give your heart

to the heavenly things, not to the passing things of earth. For, as far as this world is concerned, you are already dead, and your true life is a hidden one in God, through Christ. One day, Christ, the secret centre of our lives, will show himself openly, and you will all share in that magnificent dénouement.

In so far, then, as you have to live upon this earth, consider yourselves dead to worldly contacts: have nothing to do with sexual immorality, dirty-mindedness, uncontrolled passion, evil desire, and the lust for other people's goods, which last, remember, is as serious a sin as idolatry. It is because of these very things that the holy anger of God falls upon those who refuse to obey him. And never forget that you had your part in those dreadful things when you lived that old life.

THE GOSPEL

ST. JOHN 20. I

*The empty tomb: Christ has risen*

But on the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala arrived at the tomb, very early in the morning, while it was still dark, and noticed that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. At this she ran, found Simon Peter and the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we don't know where they have put him."

Peter and the other disciple set off at once for the tomb, the two of them running together. The other disciple ran faster than Peter and was the first to arrive at the tomb. He stooped and looked inside and noticed the linen cloths lying there but did not go in himself. Hard on his heels came Simon Peter and went straight into the tomb. He noticed that the linen cloths were lying there, and that the handkerchief, which had been round Jesus' head, was not lying with the linen cloths but was rolled up by itself, a little way apart. Then the other disciple, who was the first to arrive at the tomb, came inside as well, saw what had happened and believed. (They did not yet understand the scripture which said that he must rise from the dead.) So the disciples went back again to their homes.

## The Resurrection

Easter Day (*not* Easter Sunday) is the queen of festivals. Its name, Easter, like the names of the days of the week, is a survival from the old Teutonic mythology, and according to Bede, the early English historian, is derived from *Eostre*, the name of the Anglo-Saxon goddess of Spring. She gave her name to our April, which was known as *Eostur month*. "Now," says Bede, "it is *Paschal month* when the old festival is observed with the gladness of a new solemnity." The Latin and Greek *Pascha* follows the Hebrew *Pesach* or Passover, and the French *Pâques* has the same origin.

\* \* \*

Reasons for keeping the Easter festival, what it teaches and what it means to Christian worshippers are all set out in the Easter Anthems (given here in both translations) which stand before the Collect, Epistle and Gospel in the Prayer Book.

The first of the anthems tells us how to keep Easter—that the best way of showing gratitude for a great deliverance is to be more worthy of the blessing. Paul drives this home by an illustration. The Jews before keeping their Passover Feast, at which they ate unleavened bread, first removed every trace of leaven (dough gone sour). This meant a thorough spring-clean; not a crumb was left. So when Christians keep their new Passover (in which Christ himself is the Lamb which has been killed) they must be just as careful, Paul says, to get rid of everything that is sour—malice, for instance, and all forms of wickedness—in fact everything that will spoil the festival. The Christian's "unleavened bread" is personal integrity—a life permeated by "unadulterated truth".

The second anthem gives one reason why Easter is worth keeping. Christ is the Victor. He is risen from the dead; he has overcome death and can never die again. "He lives for God for ever." "So with yourselves," says Paul, "dead men sin-wards, living men God-wards, through Jesus Christ our Lord." His resurrection is a challenge to victorious living; for if Christ



is alive it is stupid to think that his cause or his friends are going to be beaten.

The third anthem gives a further reason for keeping Easter. His resurrection is the pledge of ours. "As members of a sinful race all men die; as members of the Christ of God all men shall be raised to life." There are no dead. A churchyard is about the emptiest place in the world. Our dead are not there. Even today they live with Christ in Paradise.

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The chosen Collect, Epistle and Gospel each take up one or more of these points. The Collect is a prayer for the new life in Christ of which the second anthem speaks. This life comes through God's grace "preventing us"; the word "prevent" is here used in its old sense of "going before, preparing the way". When God's grace directs and works in our minds, the "good desires" are brought to "good effect".

The Epistle lays further emphasis on the new life in Christ. The words, "as far as this world is concerned you are already dead", remind us of the second anthem—"dead men sin-wards, living men God-wards". The second paragraph of the Epistle gives in further detail the leaven of "vice and wickedness" referred to in the first anthem.

The Gospel shows the resurrection not as a doctrine to be believed but as a fact to be verified on evidence like all other facts. The disciple whom Jesus loved "saw what had happened, and believed". Soon he was to see the risen Lord for himself (see the Gospel for the first Sunday after Easter).

## Monday in Easter Week

### THE COLLECT

**A**LMIGHTY God, who through thy only-begotten Son Jesus Christ hast overcome death, and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life; We humbly beseech thee, that, as

by thy special grace preventing us thou dost put into our minds good desires, so by thy continual help we may bring the same to good effect; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. *Amen.*

FOR THE EPISTLE

ACTS 10. 34

*Peter's great discovery*

Then Peter began to speak:

“In solemn truth I can see now that God is no respecter of persons, but that in every nation the man who reverences him and does what is right is acceptable to him! He has sent his message to the sons of Israel by giving us the good news of peace through Jesus Christ—he is the Lord of us all. You must know the story of Jesus of Nazareth—why, it has spread through the whole of Judaea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed. You must have heard how God anointed him with the power of the Holy Spirit, of how he went about doing good and healing all who suffered from the devil’s power—because God was with him. Now we are eye-witnesses of everything that he did, both in the Judaeian country and in Jerusalem itself, and yet they murdered him by hanging him on a cross. But on the third day God raised that same Jesus and let him be clearly seen, not indeed by the whole people, but by witnesses whom God had previously chosen. We are those witnesses, we who ate and drank with him after he had risen from the dead! Moreover, we are the men whom he commanded to preach to the people and bear fearless witness to the fact that he is the one appointed by God to be the judge of both the living and the dead. It is to him that all the prophets bear witness, that every man who believes in him may receive forgiveness of sins through his name.”

*The walk to Emmaus*

Then on the same day we find two of them going off to Emmaus, a village about seven miles from Jerusalem. As they went they were deep in conversation about everything that had happened. While they were absorbed in their serious talk and discussion, Jesus himself approached and walked along with them, but something prevented them from recognising him. Then he spoke to them:

"What is all this discussion that you are having on your walk?"

They stopped, their faces drawn with misery, and the one called Cleopas replied:

"You must be the only stranger in Jerusalem who hasn't heard all the things that have happened there recently!"

"What things?" asked Jesus.

"Oh, all about Jesus, from Nazareth. There was a man—a prophet strong in what he did and what he said, in God's eyes as well as the people's. Haven't you heard how our chief priests and rulers handed him over for execution, and had him crucified? But we were hoping he was the one who was to come and set Israel free. . . .

"Yes, and as if that were not enough, it's getting on for three days since all this happened; and some of our womenfolk have disturbed us profoundly. For they went to the tomb at dawn, and then when they couldn't find his body they said that they had had a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of our people went straight off to the tomb and found things just as the women had described them—but they didn't see *him!*"

Then he himself spoke to them:

"Aren't you failing to understand, and slow to believe in all that the prophets have said? Was it not inevitable that Christ should suffer like that and so find his glory?"

Then, beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he



explained to them everything in the scriptures that referred to himself.

They were by now approaching the village to which they were going. He gave the impression that he meant to go on farther, but they stopped him with the words:

"Do stay with us. It is nearly evening and soon the day will be over."

So he went indoors to stay with them. Then it happened! While he was sitting at table with them he took the loaf, gave thanks, broke it and passed it to them. Their eyes opened wide and they knew him! But he vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other:

"Weren't our hearts glowing while he was with us on the road, and when he made the scriptures so plain to us?"

And they got to their feet without delay and turned back to Jerusalem. There they found the eleven and their friends all together, full of the news:

"The Lord is really risen—he has appeared to Simon now!"

Then they told the story of their walk, and how they recognised him when he broke the loaf.

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The Epistle, which gives the gist of what Peter said to the centurion Cornelius and his friends, like many of the speeches reported in the Acts, lays great emphasis upon the resurrection. "On the third day he rose again from the dead."

In the Gospel, one of the most beautiful stories ever written, we learn how Cleopas and his friend recognised Jesus "when he broke the loaf". It was no doubt the way he did it! Today he who lives for evermore is still known to his faithful followers in the Eucharist—the sacrament of his presence and life.

## Tuesday in Easter Week

### THE COLLECT

ALMIGHTY God, who through thy only-begotten Son Jesus Christ hast overcome death, and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life; We humbly beseech thee, that, as by thy special grace preventing us thou dost put into our minds good desires, so by thy continual help we may bring the same to good effect; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. *Amen.*

### FOR THE EPISTLE

ACTS 13. 26

*Paul proclaims the importance of the resurrection*

“Men and brothers, sons of the race of Abraham, and all among you who fear God, it is to us that this message of salvation has now been sent! For the people of Jerusalem and their rulers refused to recognise him and to understand the voice of the prophets which are read every Sabbath day—even though in condemning him they fulfilled these very prophecies! For though they found no cause for putting him to death, they begged Pilate to have him executed. And when they had completed everything that was written about him, they took him down from the cross and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead. For many days he was seen by those who had come up from Galilee to Jerusalem with him, and these men are now his witnesses to the people. And as for us we tell you the good news that the promise made to our forefathers has come true—that in raising up Jesus, God has fulfilled it for us their children. This is endorsed in the second psalm: ‘*Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee.*’ And as for the fact of God’s raising him from the dead, never to return to corruption, he has spoken in these words: ‘*I will give you the sure mercies of David.*’ And then going further he says in another psalm, ‘*Thou shalt not suffer thine holy one to see corruption.*’ For David, remember,

after he had served God's purpose in his own generation fell asleep and was laid with his ancestors. He did in fact 'see corruption', but this man whom God raised never saw corruption! It is therefore imperative, men and brothers, that every one of you should realise that forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you through this man. And through faith in him a man is absolved from all those things from which the Law of Moses could never set him free. Take care then that this saying of the prophets should never apply to you:

Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish;  
For I work a work in your days,  
A work which ye shall in no wise believe, if one declare it  
unto you."

THE GOSPEL

ST. LUKE 24. 36

*Jesus shows himself genuinely alive*

And while they were still talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them and said:

"Peace be to you all!"

But they shrank back in terror for they thought they were seeing a ghost.

"Why are you so worried?" said Jesus, "and why do doubts arise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet—it is really I myself! Feel me and see; ghosts have no flesh or bones as you can see that I have."

But while they still could not believe it through sheer joy and were quite bewildered, Jesus said to them:

"Have you anything here to eat?"

They gave him a piece of broiled fish and part of a honeycomb, which he took and ate before their eyes. Then he said:

"Here and now are fulfilled the words that I told you when I was with you: that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and in the prophets and psalms must come true."



Then he opened their minds so that they could understand the scriptures, and added:

“That is how it was written, and that is why it was inevitable that Christ should suffer, and rise from the dead on the third day. So must the change of heart which leads to the forgiveness of sins be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

“You are eye-witnesses of these things.”

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The Epistle today contains part of Paul’s speech to the Jews in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch. He recounts again the passion, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus and shows how they were a fulfilment of prophetic words in the psalms. The narrative in the Acts goes on to show that all but a few of the Jews were roused to bitter opposition, and Paul and Barnabas had to leave the city.

The Gospel records another appearance of the risen Lord, in which emphasis is laid on the *reality* of the resurrection. Christianity is not founded on the dreams or visions of disordered imaginations, but on one who in actual historical fact died and rose again. The eye-witnesses just *had* to become evangelists!

## The First Sunday after Easter

### THE COLLECT

**A**LMIGHTY Father, who hast given thine only Son to die for our sins, and to rise again for our justification; Grant us so to put away the leaven of malice and wickedness, that we may alway serve thee in pureness of living and truth; through the merits of the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

*The life of Christ in the believer*

For God's "heredity" within us will always conquer the world outside us. In fact, this faith of ours is the only way in which the world has been conquered. For who could ever be said to conquer the world, in the true sense, except the man who really believes that Jesus is God's Son? Jesus Christ himself is the one who came by water and by blood—not by the water only, but by the water and the blood. The Spirit bears witness to this, for the Spirit is the truth. The witness therefore is a triple one—the Spirit in our own hearts, the signs of the water of baptism and the blood of atonement—and they all say the same thing. If we are prepared to accept human testimony, God's own testimony concerning his own Son is surely infinitely more valuable. The man who really believes in the Son of God will find God's testimony in his own heart. The man who will not believe God is making him out to be a liar, because he is deliberately refusing to accept the testimony that God has given concerning his own Son. This is, that God has given men eternal life and this real life is to be found only in his Son. It follows naturally that any man who has genuine contact with Christ has this life; and if he has not, then he does not possess this life at all.

*The living Christ will be in the Church*

In the evening of that first day of the week, the disciples had met together with the doors locked for fear of the Jews. Jesus came and stood right in the middle of them and said, "Peace be with you!"

Then he showed them his hands and his side, and when they saw the Lord the disciples were overjoyed.

Jesus said to them again, "Yes, peace be with you! Just as the Father sent me, so I am now going to send you."

And then he breathed upon them and said, "Receive holy

spirit.\* If you forgive any men's sins, they are forgiven, and if you hold them unforgiven, they are unforgiven."

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## New Life in Christ

We may not stand apart from the great events now past; they concern us all very closely. "On the Cross our Lord gave himself for us; through the Resurrection he gives himself to us" (Pusey). So the Collect is a prayer for newness of life through the merits of Jesus Christ. Its wording is taken straight from 1 Corinthians 5. 7 which, it will be remembered, forms the first Easter anthem. (See, further, the notes for Easter Day.)

\* \* \*

A similar emphasis on newness of life in Christ is found in the Epistle. St. John speaks of faith in Christ as God's Son (which already at the time this letter was written had begun to "turn the world upside down"); then of the "triple witness"—"the Spirit in our own hearts, the signs of the water of baptism and the blood of atonement", which all say the same thing about Jesus, that he is God's Christ; then of the relationship between Christ and the believer—"God has given men eternal life and this real life is to be found only in his Son. It follows naturally that any man who has genuine contact with Christ has this life; and if he has not, then he does not possess this life at all."

\* \* \*

The Gospel tells of the new life in Christ within the Church. His presence brings peace and joy and a commission to take the Gospel to the world; but not without the gift of his risen Life (through the Holy Spirit) by which alone the Church is able to fulfil her tasks and exercise her ministry—among other things

\* Lit. "receive holy spirit". Historically the Holy Spirit was not given until Pentecost.



that of conveying God's forgiveness to the penitent and warning the impenitent they are in danger of forfeiting the mercy of God.

\* \* \*

This Sunday is often called *Low Sunday*. Some think this came about because of the contrast between it and the great festival of the Sunday before. But *low* may be a corruption of *Laudes*, the first word of the ancient Latin sequence for the day — "*Laudes Salvatori voce modulemur supplici.*"

## The Second Sunday after Easter

### THE COLLECT

ALMIGHTY God, who hast given thine only Son to be unto us both a sacrifice for sin, and also an ensample of godly life; Give us grace that we may always most thankfully receive that his inestimable benefit, and also daily endeavour ourselves to follow the blessed steps of his most holy life; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

I ST. PETER 2. 19

### *Following Christ's example*

A man does something valuable when he endures pain, as in the sight of God, though he knows he is suffering unjustly. After all, it is no credit to you if you are patient in bearing a punishment which you have richly deserved! But if you do your duty and are punished for it and can still accept it patiently, you are doing something worthwhile in God's sight. Indeed this is your calling. For Christ suffered for you and left you a personal example, and wants you to follow in his steps. He was guilty of no sin nor of the slightest prevarication. Yet when he was insulted he offered no insult in return. When he suffered he made no threats of revenge. He simply committed his cause to the one

who judges fairly. And he personally bore our sins in his own body on the cross, so that we might be dead to sin and be alive to all that is good. It was the suffering that he bore which has healed you. You had wandered away like so many sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

THE GOSPEL

ST. JOHN 10. 11

*The true shepherd of men*

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd will give his life for the sake of his sheep. But the hired man, who is not the shepherd, and does not own the sheep, will see the wolf coming, desert the sheep and run away. And the wolf will attack the flock and send them flying. The hired man runs away because he is only a hired man and has no interest in the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and I know those that are mine and my sheep know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I am giving my life for the sake of the sheep.

And I have other sheep who do not belong to this fold. I must lead these also, and they will hear my voice. So there will be one flock and one shepherd."

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### The Good Shepherd's Sacrifice and Example

The Gospel picture of Jesus as the Good Shepherd has often been interpreted too sentimentally. Pretty things are said about sheep and shepherds. But in Biblical scenes, behind all the intimacy and pastoral care, there always lurked the hidden danger. "The good shepherd will give his life for the sake of his sheep . . . and I am giving my life for the sake of the sheep." This point is taken up in the Epistle: "Christ suffered for you. . . . He personally bore our sins in his own body on the cross."

There the Good Shepherd is shown doing something for the

sheep that the sheep are powerless to do for themselves—a thought which finds expression in the words of the Collect, “to be unto us a sacrifice for sin”. This is the “inestimable benefit” we pray “always most thankfully to receive”.

But to be a Christian means accepting the sacrifice of our Lord not only as the means of our salvation but also as our ideal for daily living. Turning to the Epistle again, we notice how Peter makes this plain. He “left you a personal example, and wants you to follow in his steps”. The Lord’s death on the cross was “that we might be dead to sin and be alive to all that is good”. So we pray to “endeavour ourselves” (that is to make it our *devoir* or duty) to follow in the “blessed steps” of him who left us an “ensample”—example—“of godly life”.

\* \* \*

Two further notes:

1. “There will be one flock and one shepherd” (Gospel). In the Authorised Version and Prayer Book the words are “one fold”, not “one flock”. Bishop Westcott said of this rendering (which goes back to Jerome and the Latin Vulgate) that “it has been most disastrous in idea and influence”. Unity comes from the fact, not that all sheep are forced into one fold, but that all the sheep hear, answer and obey the one Shepherd. The basis of Christian fellowship lies in a common relationship to one Lord, one flockmaster.

2. The New Testament passages and the Collect are such as to turn our thoughts to the pastors of Christ’s flock, and the temptations and hazards of their ministry. They need the constant support of Christian prayer and the second Sunday after Easter is a good time to have them specially in remembrance.



## The Third Sunday after Easter

### THE COLLECT

ALMIGHTY GOD, who shewest to them that be in error the light of thy truth, to the intent that they may return into the way of righteousness; Grant unto all them that are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's Religion, that they may eschew those things that are contrary to their profession, and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same; through our Lord Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

I ST. PETER 2. 11

#### *The Christian in the world*

I beg you, as those whom I love, to live in this world as strangers and "temporary residents", to keep clear of the desires of your lower natures, for they are always at war with your souls. Your conduct among the surrounding peoples in your different countries should always be good and right, so that although they may in the usual way slander you as evil-doers yet when disasters come, they may glorify God when they see how well you conduct yourselves.

Obey every man-made authority for the Lord's sake—whether it is the emperor, as the supreme ruler, or the governors whom he has appointed to punish evil-doers and reward those who do good service. It is the will of God that you may thus silence the ill-informed criticisms of the foolish. As free men you should never use your freedom as an excuse for doing something that is wrong, for you are at all times the servants of God. You should have respect for everyone, you should love our brotherhood, fear God and honour the emperor.

### THE GOSPEL

ST. JOHN 16. 16

#### *Jesus promises to come again*

"In a little while you will not see me any longer, and again, in a little while you will see me."

At this some of his disciples remarked to each other, "What is this that he tells us now, 'A little while and you will not see me, and again, in a little while you will see me' and 'for I am going away to the Father'? What is this 'little while' that he talks about?" they were saying. "We simply do not know what he means!"

Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him what he meant, so he said to them, "Are you trying to find out from each other what I meant when I said, 'In a little while you will not see me, and again, in a little while you will see me'? I tell you truly that you are going to be both sad and sorry while the world is glad. Yes, you will be deeply distressed, but your pain will turn into joy. When a woman gives birth to a child, she certainly knows pain when her time comes. Yet as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers her agony for joy that a man has been born into the world. Now you are going through pain, but I shall see you again and your hearts will thrill with joy—the joy that no one can take away from you—and on that day you will not ask me any questions.

"I assure you that whatever you ask the Father he will give you in my name. Up to now you have asked nothing in my name; ask now, and you will receive, that your joy may be overflowing."

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### The Christian Calling: Christ's Abiding Presence

The Gospel discourse, as its context in the fourth Gospel shows, is represented as having been spoken before our Lord's passion and death. The opening words can be translated "A little while and you no longer have me before your eyes; again a little while and you will have a vision of me," because St. John uses two different words for "see" at the beginning and end of the sentence. The saying was meant to refer to the appearances of our Lord to his disciples after the resurrection, but

it also refers to the constant realisation of Christ's presence through the Holy Spirit by disciples in all ages.

And not for signs in heaven above  
Or earth below they look,  
Who know with John his smile of love  
With Peter his rebuke.

Our Lord's presence in the Church continues always, bringing joy to the faithful believer—"the joy that no one can take away".

\* \* \*

The Collect—with its reference to Baptism in the words "all that are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's religion"—has such faithful believers in mind, and the prayer for them is 'that they may eschew (i.e. shun, avoid, renounce) those things that are contrary to their profession' (i.e. contrary to what they believe as Christians), and dedicate themselves to obedience and active service in the Kingdom of God ("follow all such things as are agreeable to the same").

The old word "eschew" is rarely used today; it has links with *shoo*, as when we shoo away birds, and *shy*, as when we say "shy of going", etc. In the old Latin Collect the word was even stronger; it was *respuere*—to spit out.

\* \* \*

The Epistle gives in some detail what a Christian and churchman should avoid as "contrary to his profession", and in what particular ways he will show that Christ's presence through the Holy Spirit is informing and directing his life, for he is "at all times the servant of God".

And how important this is; for rightly or wrongly the outside world judges the worthwhileness of the Christian religion by the behaviour of those who profess and call themselves Christians.



## The Fourth Sunday after Easter

### THE COLLECT

O ALMIGHTY God, who alone canst order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men; Grant unto thy people, that they may love the thing which thou commandest, and desire that which thou dost promise; that so, among the sundry and manifold changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed, where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

ST. JAMES I. 17

*Only good comes from God*

But every good endowment that we possess and every complete gift that we have received must come from above, from the Father of all lights, with whom there is never the slightest variation or shadow of inconsistency. By his own wish he made us his own sons through the Word of truth, that we might be, so to speak, the first specimens of his new creation.

In view of what he has made us then, dear brothers, let every man be quick to listen but slow to use his tongue, and slow to lose his temper. For man's temper is never the means of achieving God's true goodness.

Have done, then, with impurity and every other evil which touches the lives of others, and humbly accept the message that God has sown in your hearts, and which can save your souls.

### THE GOSPEL

ST. JOHN 16. 5

*Jesus promises the Spirit of truth*

Jesus said to his disciples, "Now the time has come for me to go away to the one who sent me. None of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' That is because you are so distressed at what I have told you. Yet I am telling you the simple truth when I

assure you that it is a good thing for you that I should go away. For if I did not go away, the divine helper would not come to you. But if I go, then I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convince the world of the meaning of sin, of true goodness and of judgement. He will expose their sin because they do not believe in me; he will reveal true goodness for I am going away to the Father and you will see me no longer; and he will show them the meaning of judgement, for the spirit which rules this world will have been judged.

"I have much more to tell you but you cannot bear it now. Yet when that one I have spoken to you about comes—the Spirit of truth—he will guide you into everything that is true. For he will not be speaking of his own accord but exactly as he hears, and he will inform you about what is to come. He will bring glory to me for he will draw on my truth and reveal it to you. Whatever the Father possesses is also mine; that is why I tell you that he will draw on my truth and will show it to you."

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### Life in Conformity with God

The Collect is a prayer that God will teach our unruly wills to love best of all what he loves, and that he will fix our equally unruly affections or desires upon his promise of eternal life.

Further, life at best is uncertain; changes come quickly in the course of our lives—"sundry" changes, i.e. changes of various kinds, and "manifold" ones, i.e. many in number; but God and his promises do not change, and it is on God and his promises, says the Collect, that our hearts should be fixed.

\* \* \*

All this is easily said, but not so easily done, and it is good to find the Epistle giving a sort of commentary on the Collect. First, there is something in it about God. He is the only source of good; he is the Creator, "the Father of all lights", i.e. Maker of the heavenly bodies; he is unchanging—"with him

there is never the slightest variation or shadow of inconsistency". This is why "he alone" can order and bring under control "the unruly wills and affections of sinful men".

Secondly, there is something in the Epistle about ourselves. Those who have been called to be Christians will feel that the words of James apply to them. "He made us his own sons through the Word of truth, that we might be, so to speak, the first specimens of his new creation." We cannot be in any sense "specimens of his new creation" without "loving what he commands!"

The rest of the Epistle becomes severely practical; loss of temper, foolish speech, impurity and selfishness of every kind are all taboo if we really want the petition of the Collect to be answered.

\* \* \*

The Gospel points to the way in which the petition of the Collect *can* be made to come true. It will be through the aid of the "divine helper", who, Jesus said, would come after his own departure. He "is the Spirit of truth—he will guide you into everything that is true"; "he will draw on my truth and reveal it to you".

The references to the going away of Jesus and the coming of the Spirit in the Gospel show that we are now to look forward to Ascension Day and Whitsunday, and in a way the Gospel is a preparation for both.

## The Fifth Sunday after Easter

### THE COLLECT

**O** LORD, from whom all good things do come; Grant to us thy humble servants, that by thy holy inspiration we may think those things that be good, and by thy merciful guiding may perform the same; through our Lord Jesus Christ.  
*Amen.*



*Religion must be practical*

Don't I beg you, only hear the message, but put it into practice; otherwise you are merely deluding yourselves. The man who simply hears and does nothing about it is like a man catching the reflection of his own face in a mirror. He sees himself, it is true, but he goes on with whatever he was doing without the slightest recollection of what sort of person he saw in the mirror. But the man who looks into the perfect mirror of God's law, the law of liberty, and makes a habit of so doing, is not the man who sees and forgets. He puts that law into practice and he wins true happiness.

If anyone appears to be "religious" but cannot control his tongue, he deceives himself and we may be sure that his religion is useless. Religion that is pure and genuine in the sight of God the Father will show itself by such things as visiting orphans and widows in their distress and keeping oneself uncontaminated by the world.

*Jesus promises joy, love and peace*

"I assure you that whatever you ask the Father he will give you in my name. Up to now you have asked nothing in my name; ask now, and you will receive, that your joy may be overflowing.

"I have been speaking to you in parables—but the time is coming to give up parables and tell you plainly about the Father. When that time comes, you will make your requests to him in my name, for I need make no promise to plead to the Father for you, for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. Yes, I did come from the Father and I came into the world. Now I leave the world behind and return to the Father."

"Now you are speaking plainly," cried the disciples, "and are not using parables. Now we know that everything is known to

you—no more questions are needed. This makes us sure that you did come from God.”

“So you believe in me now?” replied Jesus. “The time is coming, indeed, it has already come, when you will be scattered, every one of you going home and leaving me alone. Yet I am not really alone, for the Father is with me. I have told you all this so that you may find your peace in me. You will find trouble in the world—but, never lose heart, I have conquered the world!”

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### God's Guidance for Thought and Action

This Sunday comes directly before the three Rogation (or asking) Days, which have been used ever since the fifth century as days of prayer for God's blessing on the crops. This Sunday, too, is often called Rogation Sunday; the Collect, Epistle and Gospel, however, have only indirect associations with the special Rogationtide intercessions. These are chiefly in the Collect and the first sentence of the Gospel.

\* \* \*

The framework of this Sunday's selections is to be found in the Collect where we ask God, from whom all good things come (including the fruits of the earth), for inspiration for our *inner* life of mind and thought, and guidance for our *outer* life of action. We find the Gospel mainly concerned with the former, and the Epistle with the latter part of the prayer.

\* \* \*

The Gospel deals with three needs for a Christian's *inner* life of mind and thought; they are prayer, faith and peace. These all, as the discourse shows, turn on the Master himself. In *prayer* the disciples are to ask “in his name”. Their *faith* about the future is based on Christ and his message: “the Father himself loves you . . . Yes, I did come from the Father and I came into the world. Now I leave the world behind and return

to the Father.” (Here the Church brings the approaching Ascension again to our minds.) Thirdly, though the disciples were in for trouble, and would meet with difficulty and persecution, they would yet find *peace* in Christ.

If our thought, by his holy inspiration, could lead us to use prayer, to have faith and to find peace in this way, we should be beginning to find the answer to one side of our Rogation prayer.

\* \* \*

The Epistle deals with behaviour, the *outer* life of action. “Put the message into practice; otherwise you are merely deluding yourselves.” A man might look into a mirror and see that his face was dirty. He could say to himself “I can’t be bothered to wash it! It doesn’t matter anyway; nobody will notice it.” That illustration, James thinks, about sums up some people’s idea of religion—thinking, seeing, knowing, *and yet doing nothing about it!*

We have to look into a different mirror, reflecting not ourselves but the glory of the Lord. It is “the dear sight of his marvellous face” that transfigures our lives, and puts religion into practice, showing itself “by such things as visiting orphans and widows in their distress” as well as by “keeping oneself uncontaminated by the world”.

## The Ascension Day

### THE COLLECT

**G**RANT, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that like as we do believe thy only-begotten Son our Lord Jesus Christ to have ascended into the heavens; so we may also in heart and mind thither ascend, and with him continually dwell, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. *Amen.*



*Luke records the ascension of Jesus*

MY DEAR THEOPHILUS,

In my first book I gave you some account of all that Jesus began to do and teach until the time of his ascension. Before he ascended he gave his instructions, through the Holy Spirit, to the special messengers of his choice. For after his suffering he showed himself alive to them in many convincing ways, and appeared to them repeatedly over a period of forty days talking with them about the affairs of the kingdom of God.

On one occasion, while he was eating a meal with them, he emphasised that they were not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the Father's promise.

"You have already heard me speak about this," he said, "for John used to baptise with water, but before many days are passed you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit."

This naturally brought them all together, and they asked him:

"Lord, is this the time when you are going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

To this he replied:

"You cannot know times and dates which have been fixed by the Father's sole authority. But you are to be given power when the Holy Spirit has come to you. You will be witnesses to me, not only in Jerusalem, not only throughout Judaea, not only in Samaria, but to the very ends of the earth!"

When he had said these words he was lifted up before their eyes till a cloud hid him from their sight. While they were still gazing up into the sky as he went, suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them and said:

"Men of Galilee, why are you standing here looking up into the sky? This very Jesus who has been taken up from you into Heaven will come back in just the same way as you have seen him go."

*Jesus returns to Heaven*

Still later he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were sitting at table and reproached them for their lack of faith, and reluctance to believe those who had seen him after he had risen. Then he said to them:

“You must go out to the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature. He who believes it and is baptised will be saved, but he who disbelieves it will be condemned. These signs will follow those who do believe: they will drive out evil spirits in my name; they will speak with new tongues; they will pick up snakes, and if they drink anything poisonous it will do them no harm; they will lay their hands upon the sick and they will recover.”

After these words to them, the Lord Jesus was taken up into Heaven and was enthroned at the right hand of God. They went out and preached everywhere. The Lord worked with them, confirming their message by the signs that followed.

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*Christ's Ascension*

The Feast of the Ascension is more honoured today in the breach than in the observance. It is quite clear that the framers of the Prayer Book meant it to be kept in special honour. Not only has it a special Collect, Epistle and Gospel, but it has also a “Proper Preface” in the Communion service. St. Augustine records that it was universally observed in the Church of his day and he reckons it along with Good Friday, Easter and Whitsuntide.

\* \* \*

The story is told in the Epistle. How is it to be understood? Perhaps some words of Bishop Westcott will help. He says, “We ought not to think of the Ascension of Christ as of a change of position, of a going immeasurably far from us. It is

rather a change of the mode of existence, a passing to God, of whom we cannot say that he is 'there' rather than 'here', of whom we all can say 'God is with me', and if God then Christ, who has ascended to the right hand of God."

In some ways *assumption* is a better word than *ascension*, for the event marked our Lord's assumption of his place of honour in Heaven at the right hand of God the Father.

The narrative in Acts certainly regards the Ascension as the completion of the life of Christ upon earth, and as the beginning of the life of the Church. Under the guiding Spirit, the Church was to be his body to carry on his work of building the Kingdom of God in the world. Today this means all Church people. We have to bear witness to Christ, to carry on evangelistic work in an age which mostly leaves God out of its calculations.

\* \* \*

What has been already said will be of help in understanding the Collect. There, having expressed our faith in the fact that our Lord is in Heaven at the right hand of God the Father, we pray to be in heart and mind where he is (note that 'thither' means 'there', 'to that place'), and continually to remain where he is. We may compare the final words of the "prayer of Humble Access" in the Communion service—"that we may evermore dwell in him and he in us."

\* \* \*

The Gospel is taken from the appendix to St. Mark, which though ancient, is a later addition to the Gospel and cannot be taken as contemporary evidence, but only as a witness of later belief. It repeats our Lord's charge to carry on his work, and says how it was obeyed and how the apostles received the help which he had promised.



## Sunday after Ascension Day

### THE COLLECT

**O** GOD the King of glory, who hast exalted thine only Son Jesus Christ with great triumph unto thy kingdom in heaven; We beseech thee, leave us not comfortless; but send to us thine Holy Ghost to comfort us, and exalt us unto the same place whither our Saviour Christ is gone before, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

I ST. PETER 4. 7

#### *The Christian attitude to life*

We are near the end of all things now, and you should therefore be calm, self-controlled men of prayer. Above everything else be sure that you have real deep love for each other, remembering how love can "cover a multitude of sins". Be hospitable to each other without secretly wishing you hadn't got to be! Serve one another with the particular gifts God has given each of you, as faithful dispensers of the magnificently varied grace of God. If any of you is a preacher then he should preach his message as from God. And in whatever way a man serves the Church he should do it recognising the fact that God gives him his ability, so that God may be glorified in everything through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and power for ever, amen!

THE GOSPEL ST. JOHN 15. 26 AND PART OF CHAPTER 16

#### *Jesus speaks of the future without his bodily presence*

"But when the helper comes, that is, the Spirit of truth, who comes from the Father and whom I myself will send to you from the Father, he will speak plainly about me. And you yourselves will also speak plainly about me for you have been with me from the first.

"I am telling you this now so that your faith in me may not be shaken. They will excommunicate you from their synagogues. Yes, the time is coming when a man who kills you will think he is thereby serving God! They will act like this because they have never had any true knowledge of the Father or of me, but I have told you all this so that when the time comes for it to happen you may remember that I told you about it."

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## The Waiting and Witnessing Church

The ancient name of this Sunday was *Dominica Expectationis*—"Waiting Sunday", in reference to the command to "wait for the Father's promise" (Acts 1. 4). The Collect, as befits this day, looks back to the Feast of the Ascension and forward to Whitsunday, and we pray that Christ by his Spirit may come to us and that we may at last go to him.

The words "leave us not comfortless" are from John 14. 18, where the Greek can be translated "leave us not *orphans*", i.e. alone in the world. We ask that the Holy Ghost may come "to comfort us". In the Authorised Version and in the Prayer Book the Holy Spirit is often called the Comforter. In the sixteenth century to "comfort" meant to "strengthen" (Latin, *confortare*—to make strong), "to confirm"; and this is what it means whenever we find it in the Prayer Book. The word "comfort" today has an altogether different emphasis, meaning to "console" or "take away pain". The Holy Spirit is still a Comforter in the modern meaning of the word, but he is far more—he comes to "put heart" into us that we may continue bravely the fight against sin, the world and the devil, rather than to "tuck us in" safely away from life's turmoil.

\* \* \*

Peter, like many in the earliest days of the Church, believed that Christ's return in glory would happen in his own lifetime. "We are near the end of all things now." Though the Church

came to realise that this was a mistake, it has never given up the belief in Christ's return; "And he shall come again with glory to judge both the quick (living) and the dead: Whose kingdom shall have no end" (Nicene Creed).

Note how both the Epistle and the Gospel show the duty of the waiting Church to be, in the power of the Holy Spirit, a witnessing Church. Having expressed our faith that he will come, one day, our business is not to bother about *when* he will come (even if we think that man's newly-discovered power of world destruction may have something to do with "the end of the world") but *what he will find* when he gets here.

## Whitsunday

### THE COLLECT

GOD, who as at this time didst teach the hearts of thy faithful people, by the sending to them the light of thy Holy Spirit; Grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgement in all things, and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort; through the merits of Christ Jesus our Saviour, who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the same Spirit, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

### FOR THE EPISTLE

### ACTS 2. I

#### *The power of the Holy Spirit*

Then when the actual day of Pentecost came they were all assembled together. Suddenly there was a sound from heaven like the rushing of a violent wind, and it filled the whole house where they were seated. Before their eyes appeared tongues like flames, which separated off and settled above the head of each one of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different languages as the Spirit gave them power to proclaim his message.



Now there were staying in Jerusalem Jews of deep faith from every nation of the world. When they heard this sound a crowd quickly collected and were completely bewildered because each one of them heard these men speaking in his own language. They were absolutely amazed and said in their astonishment:

"Listen, surely all these speakers are Galileans? Then how does it happen that every single one of us can hear the particular language he has known from a child? There are Parthians, Medes and Elamites; there are men whose homes are in Mesopotamia, in Judaea and Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and the parts of Africa near Cyrene, as well as visitors from Rome! There are Jews and proselytes, men from Crete and men from Arabia, yet we can all hear these men speaking of the magnificence of God in our native language."

THE GOSPEL

ST. JOHN 14. 15

*Jesus promises the Holy Spirit*

Jesus said to his disciples:

"If you really love me, you will keep the commandments I have given you and I shall ask the Father to give you someone else to stand by you, to be with you always. I mean the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot accept, for it can neither see nor recognise that Spirit. But you recognise him, for he is with you now and will be in your hearts. I am not going to leave you alone in the world—I am coming to you. In a very little while, the world will see me no more but you will see me, because I am really alive and you will be alive too. When that day comes, you will realise that I am in my Father, that you are in me, and I am in you.

"Every man who knows my commandments and obeys them is the man who really loves me, and every man who really loves me will himself be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and make myself known to him."

Then Judas (not Iscariot) said, "Lord, how is it that you are going to make yourself known to us but not to the world?"

And to this Jesus replied: "When a man loves me, he follows my teaching. Then my Father will love him, and we will come to that man and make our home within him. The man who does not really love me will not follow my teaching. Indeed, what you are hearing from me now is not really my saying, but comes from the Father who sent me.

"I have said all this while I am still with you. But the one who is coming to stand by you, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will be your teacher and will bring to your minds all that I have said to you.

"I leave behind with you—peace; I give you my own peace and my gift is nothing like the peace of this world. You must not be distressed and you must not be daunted. You have heard me say, 'I am going away and I am coming back to you.' If you really loved me, you would be glad because I am going to my Father, for my Father is greater than I. And I have told you of it now, before it happens, so that when it does happen, your faith in me will not be shaken. I shall not be able to talk much longer to you, for the spirit that rules this world is coming very close. He has no hold over me, but I go on my way to show the world that I love the Father and do what he sent me to do. . . ."

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## The Holy Spirit

Whitsuntide was formerly one of the special times of the year for Baptism. The name, shortened from *White-Sunday*, was probably derived from the processions of the newly-baptised, who wore white robes to show that they were cleansed from sin and dedicated to a new life through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The story of the first Whitsunday is told in the Epistle—a passage from the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles. In this book, almost certainly edited by Luke from his own travel diary and other reputable sources, the author sets out to give an account of the Church's earliest days, and he begins with its

birthday on the Feast of Pentecost, having obtained the story, no doubt, from some of those present.

The fulfilment of Christ's promise, the sudden access of power, could only be described by external impressions. The disciples were moved irresistibly as by the "rushing of a violent wind". They were set on fire by something not of themselves; they were filled with boldness and burned with a new enthusiasm. We sometimes say "something just came over me" when we can find no rational ground for an action. With the disciples what had happened was that the Holy Spirit "had come over them" and they were given the eloquence and power to make the Gospel known in a way men of many nations could understand.

St. Luke, as our translation—"they began to speak in different languages"—implies, quite clearly believed that the disciples were miraculously given power to speak in a host of foreign languages. Many scholars today think that Luke was mistaken and it is more likely that some form of ecstatic speech came from the disciples as a result of their intense experience. At this distance of time it is impossible to be certain, but of one thing we may be sure: after Pentecost there was no question about the courage, determination and eloquence shown by the little band who only a few days before had been locked behind barricaded doors "for fear of the Jews".

So by the gift and power of the Holy Spirit the Church of Christ began its work.

\* \* \*

The fourteenth chapter of St. John is one of the places in the New Testament where we read that Jesus promised the Spirit to his disciples. Note what is said about him; he is "someone to stand by us, to be with us always"; to be "in our hearts". He comes from the Father in the name of Jesus, to be our Teacher and to bring back to our minds all the words of Jesus.

\* \* \*

The Collect begins by a reference to the first Whitsunday—



“who as at this time *didst* teach”; then we ask God through the Spirit to guide all our thoughts, decisions and actions (“to have a right judgement in all things”) and to rejoice in every indication of his strengthening and heartening presence in our lives (“his holy comfort”).

## Monday in Whitsun Week

### THE COLLECT

**G**OD, who as at this time *didst* teach the hearts of thy faithful people, by the sending to them the light of thy Holy Spirit; Grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgement in all things, and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort; through the merits of Christ Jesus our Saviour, who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the same Spirit, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

### FOR THE EPISTLE

ACTS 10. 34

### *Pentecost for the Gentiles*

Then Peter began to speak:

“In solemn truth I can see now that God is no respecter of persons, but that in every nation the man who reverences him and does what is right is acceptable to him! He has sent his message to the sons of Israel by giving us the good news of peace through Jesus Christ—he is the Lord of us all. You must know the story of Jesus of Nazareth—why, it has spread through the whole of Judaea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed. You must have heard how God anointed him with the power of the Holy Spirit, of how he went about doing good and healing all who suffered from the devil’s power—because God was with him. Now we are eye-witnesses of everything that he did, both in the Judean country and in Jerusalem itself, and yet they murdered him by hanging

him on a cross. But on the third day God raised that same Jesus and let him be clearly seen, not indeed by the whole people, but by witnesses whom God had previously chosen. We are those witnesses, we who ate and drank with him after he had risen from the dead! Moreover, we are the men whom he commanded to preach to the people and bear fearless witness to the fact that he is the one appointed by God to be the judge of both the living and the dead. It is to him that all the prophets bear witness, that every man who believes in him may receive forgiveness of sins through his name."

While Peter was still speaking these words the Holy Spirit fell upon all who were listening to his message. The Jewish believers who had come with Peter were absolutely amazed that the gift of the Holy Spirit was being poured out on gentiles also; for they heard them speaking in foreign tongues and glorifying God.

Then Peter exclaimed:

"Could anyone refuse water or object to these men being baptised—men who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did ourselves?"

And he gave orders for them to be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ. Afterwards they asked him to stay with them for some days.

THE GOSPEL

ST. JOHN 3. 16

*The heart of the Gospel*

"For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him should not be lost, but should have eternal life. You must understand that God has not sent his Son into the world to pass sentence upon it, but to save it—through him. Any man who believes in him is not judged at all. It is the one who will not believe who stands already condemned, because he will not believe in the character of God's only Son. This *is* the judgement—that light has entered the world and men have preferred darkness to light because their

deeds are evil. Anybody who does wrong hates the light and keeps away from it, for fear his deeds may be exposed. But anybody who is living by the truth will come to the light to make it plain that all he has done has been done through God."

---

The Epistle describes another outpouring of the Holy Spirit—this time on the Gentile centurion, Cornelius, and his friends. It will be remembered that Peter had just come from Joppa where through a dream God had begun to show him that the growing Church was to embrace Gentiles as well as Jews within its fold. When Cornelius told him that he too had been divinely guided to send "to Joppa and invite a man called Simon, whose surname was Peter", Peter was convinced. "I can see now that God is no respecter of persons but that in every nation the man who reverences him and does what is right is acceptable to him!"

What follows is the substance of Peter's speech. Note that the Holy Spirit came upon the new disciples *even before* their Baptism. Where such proof of God's grace was given, Baptism had to follow.

\* \* \*

The Gospel was probably chosen in the first place with the newly baptised in mind. (See the notes for Whitsunday.) In it they were reminded that the Son of God had come to bring light into the world, and that in their Baptism they had come to the light and therefore had abandoned the deeds of darkness.

All this is still true for every Christian, whenever his Baptism may have taken place. And it is through the power of the Holy Spirit that we continue to "walk as children of light".



## Tuesday in Whitsun Week

### THE COLLECT

**G**OD, who as at this time didst teach the hearts of thy faithful people, by the sending to them the light of thy Holy Spirit; Grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgement in all things, and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort; through the merits of Christ Jesus our Saviour, who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the same Spirit, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

### FOR THE EPISTLE

ACTS 8. 14

#### *The first confirmation*

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the Word of God, they sent Peter and John down to them. When these two had arrived they prayed for the Samaritans that they might receive the Holy Spirit for as yet he had not fallen upon any of them. They were living simply as men and women who had been baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus. So then and there they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.

### THE GOSPEL

ST. JOHN 10. 1

#### *Jesus the true shepherd*

Jesus said, "Believe me when I tell you that anyone who does not enter the sheepfold through the door, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a rogue. It is the shepherd of the flock who goes in by the door. It is to him the door-keeper opens the door and it is his voice that the sheep recognise. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out of the fold, and when he has driven all his own flock outside, he goes in front of them himself, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will never follow a stranger—indeed, they will run away from him, for they do not recognise strange voices."

Jesus gave them this illustration but they did not grasp the point of what he was saying to them. So Jesus said to them once more, "I do assure you that I myself am the door for the sheep. All who have gone before me are like thieves and rogues, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If a man goes in through me, he will be safe and sound; he can come in and out and find his food. The thief comes with the sole intention of stealing and killing and destroying, but I came to bring them life, and far more life than before."

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The Epistle gives a further account of the gift of the Holy Spirit. This time those concerned have already been baptised and the gift is given by the laying on of hands.

This practice is still followed today, as all readers of these notes will know who have either been confirmed or been present at a Confirmation.

\* \* \*

This Gospel, like that for Monday in Whitsun week, seems to have been chosen for a special reason. In this case it is Ember-tide which has prompted the choice, and the proximity of the Trinity ordinations. At such a time it is appropriate that our Lord's discourse on true and false shepherds should be recalled. The true Shepherd came "to bring life, and far more life than before". The setting of this passage for use in Whitsun week is a reminder that this "life" is mediated to us through the Holy Spirit's gift and power.

## Trinity Sunday

### THE COLLECT

**A**LMIGHTY and everlasting God, who hast given unto us thy servants grace by the confession of a true faith to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of the Divine Majesty to worship the Unity; We beseech thee, that thou wouldest keep us steadfast in this faith, and evermore defend us from all adversities, who livest and reignest, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

REVELATION 4. 1

#### *A vision of heavenly worship*

Later I looked again, and before my eyes a door stood open in Heaven, and in my ears was the voice with the ring of a trumpet, which I had heard at first, speaking to me and saying:

“Come up here, and I will show you what must happen in the future.”

Immediately I knew myself to be inspired by the Spirit, and in my vision I saw that a throne had been set up in Heaven, and there was someone seated upon the throne. His appearance blazed like diamond and topaz, and all around the throne shone a halo like an emerald rainbow. In a circle around the throne there were twenty-four thrones and seated upon them twenty-four elders dressed in white with golden crowns upon their heads. From the central throne come flashes of lightning, noises and peals of thunder. Seven lamps are burning before the throne, and they are the seven Spirits of God. In front of the throne there appears a sea of glass as clear as crystal. On each side, encircling the throne, are four living creatures covered with eyes in front and behind. The first living creature is like a lion, the second is like a calf, the third has a face like a man, and the fourth living creature appears like an eagle in flight. These four creatures have each of them six wings and are covered with



eyes, all around them, and even within them. Day and night they never cease to say:

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is coming."

And whenever the living creatures give glory and honour and thanksgiving to the one who sits upon the throne, who lives for timeless ages, the twenty-four elders prostrate themselves before him who is seated upon the throne and worship the one who lives for timeless ages. They cast their crowns before the throne and say:

"Thou art worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honour and power, for thou didst create all things; by thy will they existed and were created."

#### THE GOSPEL

#### ST. JOHN 3. 1

#### *The natural and the spiritual*

One night Nicodemus, a leading Jew and a Pharisee, came to see Jesus.

"Master," he began, "we realise that you are a teacher who has come from God. Obviously no one could show the signs that you show unless God were with him."

"Believe me," returned Jesus, "a man cannot even see the kingdom of God without being born again."

"And how can a man who's getting old possibly be born?" replied Nicodemus. "How can he go back into his mother's womb and be born a second time?"

"I assure you," said Jesus, "that unless a man is born from water and from spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God. Flesh gives birth to flesh and spirit gives birth to spirit: you must not be surprised that I told you that all of you must be born again. The wind blows where it likes, you can hear the sound of it but you have no idea where it comes from and where it goes. Nor can you tell how a man is born by the wind of the Spirit."

"How on earth can things like this happen?" replied Nicodemus.

"So you are a teacher of Israel," said Jesus, "and you do not recognise such things? I assure you that we are talking about something we really know and we are witnessing to something we have actually observed, yet men like you will not accept our evidence. Yet if I have spoken to you about things which happen on this earth and you will not believe me, what chance is there that you will believe me if I tell you about what happens in Heaven? No one has ever been up to Heaven except the Son of Man who came down from Heaven. The Son of Man must be lifted above the heads of men—as Moses lifted up that serpent in the desert—so that any man who believes in him may have eternal life."

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## The Holy Trinity

Trinity Sunday, first observed in Liège in the tenth century, was introduced into England by Thomas à Becket and owed its acceptance largely to him. It differs from the other great festivals of the Christian Year in that, while they recall *historical events*, Trinity Sunday celebrates a *doctrine*, that is, Church truth which is also Bible truth. Earlier festivals in the Church's Year have set before us the events on which our faith is founded; now on Trinity Sunday we sum it all up; God is known to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—three Persons in one God—Trinity in Unity.

What it means to God himself to be Triune—that is Three in One and One in Three—is far beyond our understanding, but we need not be surprised; a God whom we fully understood could hardly be God any more. This is where the Collect begins. God by his own gift and grace has led us to declare our faith in him as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but for all that we worship one God only (the Unity), not three.

The petitions which follow are simple and sensible. The first is that we may hold on to our faith because those who trust in God are strong in God; the second, that we may be protected when adversity or trouble threatens—a prayer for which we have the authority of Gethsemane.

\* \* \*

The Epistle continues the thought of worship contained in the Collect. It is a vision of heaven and of the ceaseless worship offered there. Much of the symbolism is traditional and is taken from various books of the Old Testament. The first of the two Christian hymns (in verses 8 and 11) reminds us of Isaiah's vision. But the whole section is a reminder that such worship as we offer here on earth is accompanied by that of heaven. It is a sobering but at the same time an uplifting thought.

\* \* \*

The choice of our Lord's conversation with Nicodemus as the Gospel will become clear as the passage is understood. Its meaning does not lie on the surface. Perhaps the following pointers may help.

There are two worlds—that of the "flesh", the natural physical world, and that of the "spirit", the spiritual, unseen world. Just as we are *born* into the natural world as human babies, so there must be a *birth* into the spiritual world. (Note that water is mentioned; probably initiation by Baptism is meant.)

There are two things to remember about this spiritual world. First, it becomes real to us and we enter into it through the Holy Spirit, who touches our lives as and when he will. Secondly, this spiritual world is made known to us by the Son who alone has come down from Heaven.

The conversation makes clear how God has given himself and how he is known; as the Father, who is in Heaven and has sent the Son; as the Son, who came down from Heaven and was "lifted up" on the Cross "that any man who believes in him may have eternal life"; as the Spirit, who unites earth and



Heaven and stirs the spiritual life into consciousness as the wind stirs the trees.

Trinity Sunday speaks of a doctrine, but it is not "up in the air"; it speaks of a God who touches our life at every point: he is at once our Maker—the Father; our Redeemer—the Son; and our Helper—the Holy Spirit; and these we worship as Trinity in Unity.

## The First Sunday after Trinity

### THE COLLECT

**O** GOD, the strength of all them that put their trust in thee, mercifully accept our prayers; and because through the weakness of our mortal nature we can do no good thing without thee, grant us the help of thy grace, that in keeping of thy commandments we may please thee, both in will and deed; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

I ST. JOHN 4. 7

*Let us love, for God is Love*

To you whom I love I say, let us go on loving one another, for love comes from God. Every man who truly loves is God's son and has some knowledge of him. But the man who does not love cannot know him at all, for God is love.

To us, the greatest demonstration of God's love for us has been his sending his only Son into the world to give us life through him. We see real love, not in the fact that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to make personal atonement for our sins. If God loved us as much as that, surely we, in our turn, should love each other!

It is true that no human being has ever had a direct vision of God. Yet if we love each other God does actually live within us,

and his love grows in us towards perfection. And, as I wrote above, the guarantee of our living in him and his living in us is the share of his own Spirit which he gives us.

We ourselves are eye-witnesses able and willing to testify to the fact that the Father did send the Son to save the world. Everyone who acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God finds that God lives in him, and he lives in God. So have we come to know and trust the love God has for us. God *is* love, and the man whose life is lived in love does, in fact, live in God, and God does, in fact, live in him. So our love for him grows more and more, filling us with complete confidence for the day when he shall judge all men—for we realise that our life in this world is actually his life lived in us. Love contains no fear—indeed fully-developed love expels every particle of fear, for fear always contains some of the torture of feeling guilty. This means that the man who lives in fear has not yet had his love perfected.

Yes, we love him because he first loved us. If a man says, "I love God" and hates his brother, he is a liar. For if he does not love the brother before his eyes how can he love the one beyond his sight? And in any case it is his explicit command that the one who loves God must love his brother too.

#### THE GOSPEL

ST. LUKE 16. 19

#### *A parable of failing to love*

"There was once a rich man who used to dress in purple and fine linen and lead a life of daily luxury. And there was a poor man called Lazarus who was put down at his gate. He was covered with sores. He used to long to be fed with the scraps from the rich man's table. Yes, and the dogs used to come and lick his sores. Well, it happened that the poor man died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And from among the dead he looked up and saw Abraham a long way away, and Lazarus in his arms. 'Father Abraham!' he cried out, 'please pity me. Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my

tongue, for I am in agony in these flames.' But Abraham replied, 'Remember, my son, that you used to have the good things in your lifetime, while Lazarus suffered the bad. Now he is being comforted here, while you are in agony. And besides this, a great chasm has been set between you and us, so that those who want to go to you from this side cannot do so, and people cannot come to us from your side.' At this he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers. He could warn them about all this and prevent their coming to this place of torture. But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets: they can listen to them.' 'Ah, no father Abraham,' he said, 'if only someone were to go to them from the dead, they would change completely.' But Abraham told him, 'If they will not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they would not be convinced even if somebody were to rise from the dead.'"

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### God's Love and Our Response (1)

The first half of the Christian year, with its succession of Festivals and Holy Days, deals mainly with what we believe—our Christian faith. The second half, which now begins, is concerned with living the Christian life—with Christianity in action.

We can think of Christian faith and Christian life separately, but they can never really be divorced; they are parts of one whole. Some people say that as long as your life is all right, it doesn't much matter what you believe. How wrong they are is made very clear by the Epistles chosen for the first two Sundays after Trinity.

What these passages say is something like this. We have come to know what God is in himself by what he has done. He gave his only Son, who himself gave his life for us; he gives us a "share of his own Spirit"—the "guarantee of our living in him and his living in us." These loving acts of God, which we in no



way deserve, show us what God is really like. "His nature and his name is love."

Once we have taken this in, only one response is possible—we must love him too. This love for God, as it grows, will "expel every particle of fear"; but it will also be a love for others—for the "brother before our eyes", and this last is the acid test of whether our love for God is genuine.

(Note: (1) On the word "love" in the New Testament see the notes for Quinquagesima. (2) "Loving" people and "liking" them should not be confused. We are not called upon to like everybody, but we are called upon to love them whether we like them or not.)

\* \* \*

The Gospel parable (and note that it *is* a parable, so that its Jewish ideas and framework should not be pressed), shows one man's failure in the business of loving his brother. He failed as do all who live selfish, self-centred lives. His brother was in need, but he just did nothing about it; the truth was that he loved only himself. The parable shows the Epistles for the first two Sundays after Trinity in reverse! By his self-centredness the rich man had grown further and further away from God, and realised his folly—too late.

\* \* \*

The meaning of the Collect is plain enough and will have added point if the words "grace" and "commandments" are spot-lighted from the Epistle. "Grace" we may think of as "the share of his own Spirit which he gives us". For "commandments" turn to the final verse—"It is his explicit command that the one who loves God must love his brother too."

## The Second Sunday after Trinity

### THE COLLECT

**O** LORD, who never failest to help and govern them whom thou dost bring up in thy stedfast fear and love; Keep us, we beseech thee, under the protection of thy good providence, and make us to have a perpetual fear and love of thy holy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

I ST. JOHN 3. 13

*Living in love means confidence in God*

Don't be surprised, therefore, if the world hates you.

We know that we have crossed the frontier from death to life because we do love our brothers. The man without love for his brother is living in death already. The man who actively hates his brother is a potential murderer, and you will readily see that the eternal life of God cannot live in the heart of a murderer.

We know and, to some extent realise, the love of God for us because Christ expressed it in laying down his life for us. We must in turn express our love by laying down our lives for those who are our brothers. But as for the well-to-do man who sees his brother in want but shuts his eyes—and his heart—how could anyone believe that the love of God lives in him? My children, let us love not merely in theory or in words—let us love in sincerity and in practice!

If we live like this, we shall know that we are children of the truth and can reassure ourselves in the sight of God, even if our own hearts make us feel guilty. For God is infinitely greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. And if, dear friends of mine, when we realise this our hearts no longer accuse us, we may have the utmost confidence in God's presence. We receive whatever we ask for, because we are obeying his orders and following his plans. His orders are that we should put our trust

in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another—as we used to hear him say in person.

The man who does obey God's commands lives in God and God lives in him, and the guarantee of his presence within us is the Spirit he has given us.

THE GOSPEL

ST. LUKE 14. 16

*Men are "too busy" for God*

"Once upon a time, a man planned a big dinner party and invited a great many people. At dinner-time, he sent his servant out to tell those who were invited, 'Please come, everything is ready now.' But they all, as one man, began to make their excuses. The first one said to him, 'I have bought some land. I must go and look at it. Please excuse me.' Another one said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen and am on my way to try them out. Please convey my apologies.' And another one said, 'I have just got married and I am sure you will understand I cannot come.' So the servant returned and reported all this to his master. The master of the house was extremely annoyed and said to his servant, 'Hurry out now into the streets and alleys of the town, and bring here the poor and crippled and blind and lame.' Then the servant said, 'I have done what you told me, sir, and there are still empty places.' Then the master replied, 'Now go out to the roads and hedgerows and make them come inside, so that my house may be full. For I tell you that not one of the men I invited shall have a taste of my dinner.'"

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God's Love and Our Response (2)

Today's Epistle makes in different words largely the same points as were noticed in last Sunday's selection. See the notes under Trinity 1.

The Collect and the Gospel deal with our response to God's love. The story of the party in the Gospel was meant in the



first place to refer to the Jewish rejection of Jesus and the opening out of God's Kingdom to the Gentiles, but like most parables it has other meanings. Let us give it two Twentieth Century applications.

1. Supposing, for instance, that we think of the party as the  
"sacred feast which Jesus makes  
rich banquet of his Flesh and Blood",

are there not many who are "otherwise engaged" or "too busy" to accept the invitation? Yet here in the Holy Sacrament, as indeed in all our services, it is the very love of God which reaches down to meet our wants and needs.

2. When the Church presents the challenge of the Gospel and meets with no response, like the host in the parable, she must be ready to go further afield, if needs be to the ends of the earth. In her evangelistic work the Church has no frontiers, racial or otherwise; her message is for all men.

\* \* \*

Behind the words of the Collect lies the idea of growing up in a family. God, our Father, looks after us with all a father's love and care, and through his family the Church provides the means by which we are brought up to respect and love him and the family traditions. ("In thy steadfast fear and love" means to have a sturdy reverence and affection for God; it does not refer to God's love for us.) We ask him to go on taking care of us (this is what is meant by being kept "under the protection of his good providence"), and to help us to go on loving and respecting him throughout our adult life.

## The Third Sunday after Trinity

### THE COLLECT

**O** LORD, we beseech thee mercifully to hear us; and grant that we, to whom thou hast given an hearty desire to pray, may by thy mighty aid be defended and comforted in all dangers and adversities; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

I ST. PETER 5. 5

*Be humble, trustful, vigilant*

You younger members must also submit to the elders. Indeed all of you should defer to one another and wear the "overall" of humility in serving each other. God is always against the proud, but he is always ready to give grace to the humble. So, humble yourselves under God's strong hand, and in his own good time he will lift you up. You can throw the whole weight of your anxieties upon him, for you are his personal concern.

Be self-controlled and vigilant always, for your enemy the devil is always about, prowling like a lion roaring for its prey. Resist him, standing firm in your faith and remember that the strain is the same for all your fellow-Christians in other parts of the world. And after you have borne these sufferings a very little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to share his eternal splendour through Christ, will himself make you whole and secure and strong. All power is his for ever and ever, amen!

### THE GOSPEL

ST. LUKE 15. 1

*Jesus' parables of the love of God*

Now all the tax-collectors and "outsiders" were crowding around to hear what he had to say. The Pharisees and the scribes complained of this, remarking:

"This man accepts sinners and even eats his meals with them."

So Jesus spoke to them, using this parable:

"Wouldn't any man among you who owned a hundred sheep, and lost one of them, leave the ninety-nine to themselves in the open, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he will put it on his shoulders with great joy, and as soon as he gets home, he will call his friends and neighbours together. 'Come and celebrate with me,' he will say, 'for I have found that sheep of mine which was lost.' I tell you that it is the same in Heaven—there is more joy over one sinner whose heart is changed than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need for repentance.

"Or if there is a woman who has ten silver coins, if she should lose one, won't she take a lamp and sweep and search the house from top to bottom until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls her friends and neighbours together. 'Come and celebrate with me,' she says, 'for I have found that coin I lost.' I tell you, it is the same in Heaven—there is rejoicing among the angels of God over one sinner whose heart is changed."

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### Three Needs of Prayer

This Sunday, as so often, if Collect, Epistle and Gospel are each taken alone they will lead our thoughts in many directions. But when we try to see them together and in relationship to one another, we find the Epistle and Gospel bringing out ideas which underlie the Collect (and indeed all true prayer).

Three needs of Christian prayer are mentioned in the Epistle and Gospel. We can no more dispense with any of them than a three-legged stool with any of its legs!

\* \* \*

Peter (in the Epistle) mentioned two of these needs. First, he says, humble yourselves before God. Secondly, remember that though as Christians you have your part to play, you are in God's hands. All grace and power belong to him and to no one else.



The third thing needed is mentioned in the Gospel. The shepherd who cares so much for his sheep that he cannot afford to lose even one, and the woman with her lamp sweeping and searching the house for her lost coin—are pictures given us by Jesus of God himself. Every one is of infinite value in his sight. To recognise that God loves and cares is the third leg of the stool of prayer.

\* \* \*

Now turn to the Collect. It is easy to see how all this works out. First, the very fact that we stop to ask God for help at all shows that we have learned to be humble. Secondly, we admit we are in God's hands when we ask that "his mighty aid" may come to the rescue. Thirdly, the shepherd-love which seeks and saves is our reason for asking to be defended and comforted (i.e. strengthened) in the day of adversity.

The Collect is limited in its scope; it is only for those who have discovered a "heartly desire to pray", and this is by no means everybody. There are lots of people who seem to have no such desire. Perhaps it is right to limit the prayer in this way, but this does not mean that we are not to go on praying and working for the day when all shall have come to know and love God. The shepherd seeking his sheep and the woman with her brush are good authority for that!

## The Fourth Sunday after Trinity

### THE COLLECT

**O** GOD, the protector of all that trust in thee, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy; Increase and multiply upon us thy mercy; that, thou being our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we finally lose not the things eternal: Grant this, O heavenly Father, for Jesus Christ's sake our Lord. *Amen.*

*What we see now is temporary*

In my opinion whatever we may have to go through now is less than nothing compared with the magnificent future God has planned for us. The whole creation is on tiptoe to see the wonderful sight of the sons of God coming into their own. The world of creation cannot as yet see reality, not because it chooses to be blind, but because in God's purpose it has been so limited—yet it has been given hope. And the hope is that in the end the whole of created life will be rescued from the tyranny of change and decay, and have its share in that magnificent liberty which can only belong to the children of God!

It is plain to anyone with eyes to see that at the present time all created life groans in a sort of universal travail. And it is plain, too, that we who have a foretaste of the Spirit are in a state of painful tension, while we wait for that redemption of our bodies which will mean that at last we have realised our full sonship in him.

*Jesus' advice to the sons of God*

"You must be merciful, as your Father in Heaven is merciful. Don't judge other people and you will not be judged yourselves. Don't condemn and you will not be condemned. Make allowances for others and people will make allowances for you. Give and men will give to you—yes, good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over will they pour into your lap. For whatever measure you use with other people, they will use in their dealings with you."

Then he gave them an illustration:

"Can one blind man be guide to another blind man? Surely they will both fall into the ditch together. A disciple is not above his teacher, but when he is fully trained he will be like his teacher.

“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and fail to notice the plank in your own? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye’ when you cannot see the plank in your own? You fraud, take the plank out of your own eye first and then you can see clearly enough to remove your brother’s speck.”

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## God’s Purpose and Ourselves

“God is working his purpose out”—his purpose for men and women and for the whole of Creation. This is Paul’s theme in the Epistle. Men and women, as the highest beings God has made in the world, come first. For them “the best is yet to be”; God has planned for them a “magnificent future”.

But for the time being there is suffering everywhere. “All created life groans in a sort of universal travail.” Suffering in the created world—among animals for instance—is nearly as distressing as in men and women. All this makes the wonderful promises about the future hard to understand.

As far as suffering is concerned we will be wise not to say “God sends it” or “it is God’s will”, but rather “God uses it to bring about good, and makes it one of the means of achieving his purpose.”

Paul has a lively picture of creation—“on tiptoe” eagerly waiting for “the wonderful sight of the sons of God coming into their own”. We may imagine creation saying to itself, “My turn next!” (Incidentally this working out of God’s purpose is going on all the time—it is not just some “far-off divine event”. If men were more Christian *now*, there would, for instance, be far less suffering in the animal kingdom and the R.S.P.C.A. might not be needed. How is it with your animals and pets? Do you give them proper care and attention?)

\* \* \*

“God is working his purpose out” is also the idea underlying the Collect, where we pray for more of God’s compassionate



care (this is what "mercy" means); so that he may rule in our lives and lead us from earth ("things temporal"—lasting only for a time) to heaven ("things eternal"), where God's plans are finally completed.

Note that we are to *pass through* things temporal—"the world is a bridge to pass over, not to build upon"—but this does not mean that we are to be unconcerned with this life. So far from being "a pie in the sky" Christianity is a challenge to every man of faith to help God finish his new creation here and now.

\* \* \*

The Gospel tells us a little about the sort of people God calls to be his helpers. If all Christians could get round to following out even this one bit of the teaching of Jesus, creation would be amply rewarded for its long wait "on tiptoe"—by the "wonderful sight of the sons of God coming into their own!"

## The Fifth Sunday after Trinity

### THE COLLECT

**G**RANT, O Lord, we beseech thee, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by thy governance, that thy Church may joyfully serve thee in all godly quietness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

I ST. PETER 3. 8

*Be good to each other—and to all men*

You should all be of one mind living like brothers with true love and sympathy for each other, generous and courteous at all times. Never pay back a bad turn with a bad turn or an insult with another insult, but on the contrary pay back with good.

For this is your calling—to do good and one day to inherit all the goodness of God. For:

He that would love life,  
And see good days,  
Let him refrain his tongue from evil,  
And his lips that they speak no guile:  
And let him turn away from evil, and do good;  
Let him seek peace and pursue it.  
For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous,  
And his ears unto their supplication:  
But the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.

After all, who in the ordinary way is likely to injure you for being enthusiastic for good? And if it should happen that you suffer “for righteousness’ sake”, that is a privilege. You need neither fear their threats nor worry about them; simply concentrate on being completely devoted to Christ in your hearts.

THE GOSPEL

ST. LUKE 5. 1

### *Jesus calls Simon*

One day the people were crowding closely round Jesus to hear God’s message, as he stood on the shore of Lake Gennesaret. Jesus noticed two boats drawn up on the beach, for the fishermen had left them there while they were cleaning their nets. He went aboard one of the boats, which belonged to Simon, and asked him to push out a little from the shore. Then he sat down and continued his teaching of the crowds from the boat.

When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Push out now into deep water and let down your nets for a catch.”

Simon replied, “Master! We’ve worked all night and never caught a thing, but if you say so, I’ll let the nets down.”

And when they had done this, they caught an enormous shoal of fish—so big that the nets began to tear. So they signalled to their friends in the other boat to come and help them. They came

and filled both the boats to sinking point. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell on his knees before Jesus and said,

“Keep away from me, Lord, for I’m only a sinful man!”

For he and his companions (including Zebedee’s sons, James and John, Simon’s partners) were staggered at the haul of fish that they had made.

Jesus said to Simon: “Don’t be afraid, Simon. From now on your catch will be *men*.”

So they brought the boats ashore, left everything and followed him.

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## The Church in the World

The fifth Sunday after Trinity is concerned with the world and the Church. “World” as used in the Collect means all nations—Communist and non-Communist—thought of as organised apart from God.

The prayer here is that all the world’s rulers and peoples by following God’s appointed way (“ordered by his governance”), may pursue the paths of peace, and we ask for peace in the world so that the Church may be better able to serve God.

To serve God no doubt means “services”—the ceaseless offering of prayer and worship—but it means also proclaiming and living the Gospel in a world sometimes indifferent, sometimes openly hostile. Note, first, it is to be a *joyful* service. No one will ever be able to measure the harm done by gloomy, long-faced Christians! Secondly, it may well be done *quietly*. There is a place for mass campaigns and publicity and we should be wrong to neglect them, but the Collect rightly reminds us that in the last resort personal contact and quiet devoted Christian service is what really counts.

\* \* \*

The Epistle speaks of some of the things we should and shouldn’t do in commending the Gospel. If Christians cannot live as a family, if in practice they fail to show the love which



they profess, how can they expect to serve God properly and bring the joy of the Gospel to a distracted and often quarrelsome world?

Then there is a further test. Christians may be called upon to serve God faithfully in face of bitter persecution, as were many of the readers of Peter's letter, and as have been many in the concentration camps of our own century. Peter unfolds the secret of their resistance. They neither fear threats nor worry about them; they simply concentrate on being completely devoted to Christ in their hearts.

\* \* \*

The Gospel, in this context may be thought of as a parable of the Church's life and work in the world—Evangelism, preaching the Gospel and fishing for men. Without God our own plans, times and methods will fail, but nothing is impossible if our Lord wills it.

## The Sixth Sunday after Trinity

### THE COLLECT

**O** GOD, who hast prepared for them that love thee such good things as pass man's understanding; Pour into our hearts such love towards thee, that we, loving thee above all things, may obtain thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

ROMANS 6. 3

*Dead to sin; alive to God*

Have you forgotten that all of us who were baptised into Jesus Christ were, by that very action, sharing in his death? We were dead and buried with him in baptism, so that just as he was raised from the dead by that splendid revelation of the Father's

power so we too might rise to life on a new plane altogether. If we have, as it were, shared his death, let us rise and live our new lives with him! Let us never forget that our old selves died with him on the cross that the tyranny of sin over us might be broken—for a dead man can safely be said to be immune to the power of sin. And if we were dead men with him we can believe that we shall also be men newly alive with him. We can be sure that the risen Christ never dies again—death's power to touch him is finished. He died, because of sin, once: he lives for God for ever. In the same way look upon yourselves as dead to the appeal and power of sin but alive and sensitive to the call of God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Do not, then, allow sin to establish any power over your mortal bodies in making you give way to your lusts. Nor hand over your organs to be, as it were, weapons of evil for the devil's purposes. But, like men rescued from certain death, put yourselves in God's hands as weapons of good for his own purposes. For sin is not meant to be your master—you are no longer living under the Law, but under grace.

THE GOSPEL

ST. MATTHEW 5. 20

*The high standards of the Kingdom*

Jesus said: "I tell you that your goodness must be a far better thing than the goodness of the scribes and Pharisees before you can set foot in the kingdom of Heaven at all!

"You have heard that it was said to the people in the old days, '*Thou shalt not murder*', and anyone who does so must stand his trial. But I say to you that anyone who is angry with his brother must stand his trial; anyone who contemptuously calls his brother a fool must face the supreme court; and anyone who looks down on his brother as a lost soul is himself heading straight for the fire of destruction.

"So that if, while you are offering your gift at the altar, you should remember that your brother has something against you, you must leave your gift there before the altar and go away.

Make your peace with your brother first, then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your opponent while you have the chance, or else he may hand you over to the judge and the judge in turn hand you over to the officer of the court and you will be thrown into prison. Believe me, you will never get out again till you have paid your last farthing!"

---

## Christian Standards of Love and Duty

The Collect should not be misunderstood. At the beginning and the end it makes it plain that "God has everything laid on" both in this world and the next, but we do not pray to love him because of what we hope to get. The love we ask him for is love without a tinge of selfishness or sentimentalism, seeking in no way to get but only to give. To love God with this kind of love is to "rise to life on a new plane altogether". It means to be on God's side, to love God's other children and to do what God would have us do (which is so often different from what we want to do ourselves).

\* \* \*

Here the Epistle fits in. Paul is pointing out what becoming a Christian means, and he takes his readers back to their baptism. Most of them had been heathen, and baptism meant a clean break with their sinful life. They were plunged entirely beneath the water and then came up out of it to a new life altogether. (Such a baptism was of course not in a font in a church but somewhere outside, and by total immersion.)

Thus baptism at once suggested burial and rising again—death and resurrection—and these thoughts are the clue to Paul's meaning. In their baptism the new converts became identified with Christ and Christ with them—in death and resurrection. They knew they had risen to "life on a new plane altogether", their old selves having died with him on the Cross that the tyranny of sin might be broken; and they also knew



that it was "through Jesus Christ our Lord" that they were "alive and sensitive to the call of God".

\* \* \*

In the Gospel our Lord enforces the same lesson—that Christian standards are higher than all others and binding upon those who would "love God above all things". This is illustrated from the sixth Commandment. Jesus shows that a man may break it not only by murder but also by showing anger, contempt and hatred. (Notice how our Lord's standards for the Christian reverse the standards of everyday life, making personal abuse, giving people a bad name or running them down a most serious offence.)

Further, a Christian has a *positive* duty; he must *keep* the Commandment by being ready not only to forgive but also to ask for forgiveness and to apologise when he has been at fault. He ought never "to draw near" unless he is "in love and charity" with his neighbours.

## The Seventh Sunday after Trinity

### THE COLLECT

**L**ORD of all power and might, who art the author and giver of all good things; Graft in our hearts the love of thy Name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of thy great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

ROMANS 6. 19

### *Working for a new master*

In the past you voluntarily gave your bodies to the service of vice and wickedness—for the purpose of becoming wicked. So, now, give yourselves to the service of righteousness—for the

purpose of becoming really good. For when you were employed by sin you owed no duty to righteousness. Yet what sort of a harvest did you reap from those things that today you blush to remember? In the long run those things mean one thing only—death.

But now that you are employed by God, you owe no duty to sin, and you reap the fruit of being made righteous, while at the end of the road there is life for evermore.

Sin *pays* its servants: the wage is death. But God *gives* to those who serve him: His free gift is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.

#### THE GOSPEL

#### ST. MARK 8. 1

#### *Jesus feeds the hungry*

About this time it happened again that a large crowd collected and had nothing to eat. Jesus called the disciples over to him and said:

“My heart goes out to this crowd; they have been with me three days now and they have no food left. If I send them off home without anything, they will collapse on the way—and some of them have come from a distance.”

His disciples replied,

“Where could anyone find the food to feed them here in this deserted spot?”

“How many loaves have you got?” Jesus asked them.

“Seven,” they replied.

So Jesus told the crowd to settle themselves on the ground. Then he took the seven loaves into his hands, and with a prayer of thanksgiving broke them, and gave them to the disciples to distribute to the people; and this they did. They had a few small fish as well, and after blessing them, Jesus told the disciples to give these also to the people. They ate and they were satisfied. Moreover, they picked up seven baskets full of pieces left over. The people numbered about four thousand. Jesus sent

them home, and then he boarded the boat at once with his disciples and went on to the district of Dalmanutha.

---

## Servants of God

First, the Epistle. What is Paul's everyday illustration? Brought up to date it is that of a man who has left one job and one master for a fresh job under a new master. It is like this with the Christian; he has left one master—sin—to take different employment under a new master—Jesus Christ. This means that his first master has nothing more to do with him, and he has nothing more to do with his old job.

But further, service under the new master is a wonderful experience and the reward is far more than wages: "His free gift is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord."

\* \* \*

The Gospel speaks of a "free gift" too. The hungry folk were fed; they were not sent empty away. In this task the disciples helped. The miracle still continues; the Master still lays upon his servants within his Church the task of distributing the living Bread which is his Body and the Wine which is his Blood. The ministry of the sacrament as well as the ministry of the word is there to meet the needs of hungry multitudes today.

\* \* \*

We have seen that the theme for this Sunday is taking service under God, being employed by him. Like every worker in every job a Christian has to make a beginning; then to learn, develop and become more proficient as time goes on. This is the idea of the Collect; it is a prayer that God will take us in hand as a gardener does his special plants. First he grafts the young shoots on to a sturdy stock; then he sees to their growth and feeds them, giving them continual care and oversight. The Collect asks God to do something like this for each of us, in his own way and in his own time.



## The Eighth Sunday after Trinity

### THE COLLECT

**O** GOD, whose never-failing providence ordereth all things both in heaven and earth; We humbly beseech thee to put away from us all hurtful things, and to give us those things which be profitable for us; through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
*Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

ROMANS 8. 12

*Follow the spirit, as God's sons*

So then, my brothers, you can see that we have no particular reason to feel grateful to our sensual nature, or to live life on the level of the instincts. Indeed that way of living leads to certain spiritual death. But if on the other hand you cut the nerve of your instinctive actions by obeying the Spirit, you are on the way to real living.

All who follow the leading of God's Spirit are God's own sons. Nor are you meant to relapse into the old slavish attitude of fear—you have been adopted into the very family circle of God and you can say with a full heart, "Father, my Father". The Spirit himself endorses our inward conviction that we really are the children of God. Think what that means. If we are his children we share his treasures, and all that Christ claims as his will belong to all of us as well! Yes, if we share in his suffering we shall certainly share in his glory.

### THE GOSPEL

ST. MATTHEW 7. 15

*Living, not professing, is what matters*

"Be on your guard against false religious teachers, who come to you dressed up as sheep but are really greedy wolves. You can tell them by their fruit. Do you pick a bunch of grapes from a thorn-bush or figs from a clump of thistles? Every good tree produces good fruit, but a bad tree produces bad fruit. A good

tree is incapable of producing bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot produce good fruit. The tree that fails to produce good fruit is cut down and burnt. So you may know men by their fruit.

"It is not everyone who keeps saying to me 'Lord, Lord' who will enter the kingdom of Heaven, but the man who actually does my Heavenly Father's will."

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### Service in God's Family

Jesus taught his disciples to think of God as their Father and of themselves as God's children. This would provide a pattern for their prayers. "When you pray, say 'Our Father,'" Not many of the Prayer Book Collects address God in this way (there are only two in the whole Christian Year), but in quite a number thoughts find expression which stem naturally from the idea of God's Fatherhood. The present Collect is a case in point.

Notice that it begins with the thought of the Father's care (his "never-failing providence"); then it goes on to speak of the Father's discipline (he "orders" everything). We ask that God, our Father, will protect us from harm and give us only what is good for us (not, let it be noted, everything we ask for!). The Collect in fact is putting into other words two parts of the Lord's Prayer—"lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil".

\* \* \*

The Epistle develops the same theme. Paul re-enforces the teaching of Jesus. "The Spirit himself endorses our inward conviction that we really are the children of God". We learn of the privileges of being "adopted into the very family circle of God" and some of its duties too.

\* \* \*

These duties form the theme of the Gospel. Every family has its own code, its own pattern of behaviour, its own likeness, just

as every tree has its own proper fruit. We can imagine Jesus saying, "Don't let people throw dust in your eyes; there is only one way of matching up to membership of God's family, and that is by doing the Father's will. Mere talk will not do!"

## The Ninth Sunday after Trinity

### THE COLLECT

**G**RANT to us, Lord, we beseech thee, the spirit to think and do always such things as be rightful; that we, who cannot do any thing that is good without thee, may by thee be enabled to live according to thy will; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

### I CORINTHIANS IO. I

*Whatever our experience, we need God's help*

For I should like to remind you, my brothers, that our ancestors all had the experience of being guided by the cloud in the desert and of crossing the sea dry-shod. They were all, so to speak, "baptised" into Moses by these experiences. They all shared the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink (for they drank from the spiritual rock which followed them, and that rock was Christ). Yet in spite of all these wonderful experiences many of them failed to please God, and left their bones in the desert. Now in these events our ancestors stand as examples to us, warning us not to crave after evil things as they did. Nor are you to worship false gods as they did. The scripture says:

The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither should we give way to sexual immorality as did some of them, for we read that twenty-three thousand fell in a single



day! Nor should we dare to exploit the goodness of God as some of them did, and fell victims to poisonous snakes. Nor yet must you curse the lot that God has appointed to you as they did, and met their end at the hand of the angel of death.

Now these things which happened to our ancestors are illustrations of the way in which God works, and they were written down to be a warning to us who are the heirs of the ages which have gone before us.

So let the man who feels sure of his standing today be careful that he does not fall tomorrow.

No temptation has come your way that is too hard for flesh and blood to bear. But God can be trusted not to allow you to suffer any temptation beyond your powers of endurance. He will see to it that every temptation has a way out, so that it will never be impossible for you to bear it.

THE GOSPEL

ST. LUKE 16. 1

*A lesson from a clever rogue*

Then there is this story which Jesus told his disciples:

“Once there was a rich man whose agent was reported to him to be mismanaging his property. So he summoned him and said, ‘What’s this that I hear about you? Give me an account of your stewardship—you’re not fit to manage my household any longer.’ At this the agent said to himself, ‘What am I going to do now that my employer is taking away the stewardship from me? I am not strong enough to dig and I can’t sink to begging. Ah, I know what I’ll do so that when I lose my position people will welcome me into their homes!’ So he sent for each one of his master’s debtors. ‘How much do you owe my master?’ he said to the first. ‘A hundred barrels of oil,’ he replied. ‘Here,’ replied the agent, ‘take your bill, sit down, hurry up and write in fifty.’ Then he said to another, ‘And what’s the size of your debt?’ ‘A thousand bushels of wheat,’ he replied. ‘Take your bill,’ said the agent, ‘and write in eight hundred.’ Now the master praised this rascally steward because he had been so

careful for his own future. For the children of this world are considerably more shrewd in dealing with their contemporaries than the children of light. Now my advice to you is to use 'money', tainted as it is, to make yourselves friends, so that when it comes to an end, they may welcome you into eternal habitations."

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## Success and Failure in Doing God's Will

The words in the Collect, "to think and do always such things as be rightful" and "to live according to thy will" are two ways of saying more or less the same thing, and we pray that God will (1) implant in us the determination to think and do what is right, and (2) help us to achieve it. (The hymn "Breathe on me, Breath of God" is a wonderful commentary on this Collect.)

\* \* \*

The Epistle shows what happens when people do not put God's will first, when they take him out of the centre of the picture and put themselves there. Paul was writing to Christians living in Corinth—a notoriously wicked city—where it was no easy task to live life on the Christian level. We can sympathise with them; we find it hard too.

Paul uses the Israelites as his illustration and makes well-known incidents "sacramental". For the Israelites the desert life and the crossing of the Red Sea stood between their old life and their new; so Baptism now separates us from the old or former life. Further, they received food and drink direct from God (manna, and water when Moses struck the rock); these Paul links with the Christian Sacrament of the Bread and Wine by which our souls are strengthened and refreshed. ("That rock was Christ.")

But they failed in spite of all God's help, giving way to idolatry, sexual immorality and grumbling discontent. Note

that in each of these three things God is dethroned—and that is always the first step towards doing some other will than his.

All this is a “warning to us who are the heirs of the ages”. They failed, but that is no reason why we should! God’s grace is strong enough; in his power, if we really mean business, we can overcome the toughest temptation.

\* \* \*

The Gospel story of the clever rogue has often raised difficulties, but its main lesson is simple enough and is in line with the Sunday’s subject—the doing of God’s will. The rich man’s agent was resourceful, far-seeing and thorough. All our Lord was saying is that these same qualities are needed in the “children of light”.

## The Tenth Sunday after Trinity

### THE COLLECT

LET thy merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of thy humble servants; and that they may obtain their petitions make them to ask such things as shall please thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

### I CORINTHIANS 12. 1

#### *The Spirit’s varied gifts*

Now I want to give you some further information in some spiritual matters. You have not forgotten that you were gentiles, following dumb idols just as your impulses led you. Now I want you to understand, as Christians, that no one speaking by the Spirit of God could call Jesus accursed, and no one could say that he is the Lord, except by the Holy Spirit.

Men have different gifts, but it is the same Spirit who gives them. There are different ways of serving God, but it is the same Lord who is served. God works through different men in



different ways, but it is the same God who achieves his purposes through them all. Each man is given his gift by the Spirit that he may use it for the common good.

One man's gift by the Spirit is to speak with wisdom, another's to speak with knowledge. The same Spirit gives to another man faith, to another the ability to heal, to another the power to do great deeds. The same Spirit gives to another man the gift of preaching the word of God, to another the ability to discriminate in spiritual matters, to another speech in different tongues, and to yet another the power to interpret the tongues. Behind all these gifts is the operation of the same Spirit, who distributes to each individual man, as he wills.

#### THE GOSPEL

ST. LUKE 19. 41

#### *Jesus weeps at the blindness of Jerusalem*

And as he came still nearer to the city, he caught sight of it and wept over it, saying:

"Ah, if you only knew, even at this eleventh hour, on what your peace depends—but you cannot see it. The time is coming when your enemies will encircle you with ramparts, surrounding you and hemming you in on every side. And they will hurl you and all your children to the ground—yes, they will not leave you one stone standing upon another—all because you did not know when God himself was visiting you!"

Then he went into the Temple, and proceeded to throw out the traders there.

"It is written," he told them, "'My house shall be a house of prayer', but you have turned it into a thieves' kitchen!"

Then day after day he continued teaching inside the Temple.

---

### Meeting the Claims of God

In the Epistle, Paul first reminds his readers that in their heathen days they had listened to the "messages" or "oracles"

supposed to come from dumb idols, but now, through the Holy Spirit, they expressed their faith in the words "Jesus is the Lord" (words which formed the first Christian Creed). God had claimed them for himself, through Jesus Christ, and so they implicitly trusted and obeyed him.

Secondly, Paul shows that the varied talents and abilities men possess are all gifts of the Holy Spirit and a trust from God. To such generosity there could (and can) be only one Christian answer: "Each man is given his gift by the Spirit that he may use it for the common good."

\* \* \*

The Gospel contains, first, the sad story of the fate of the city which rejected God's greatest gift of all—that of his only Son, Jesus Christ—and the claims he made in God's name upon their lives. Secondly, it brings before us the proud churchmen who were so pre-occupied in making money that they had forgotten what a church was for and how to worship in it. They had certainly become blind to the real claims of God upon their lives.

\* \* \*

The Collect is a simple prayer in which we ask to live a life pleasing to God. We shall do this by meeting the claims of God upon us—a thing which is only possible when our minds and wills have been "stabbed broad awake" through the power of concentrated prayer.

## The Eleventh Sunday after Trinity

### THE COLLECT

**O** GOD, who declarest thy almighty power most chiefly in shewing mercy and pity; Mercifully grant unto us such a measure of thy grace, that we, running the way of thy commandments, may obtain thy gracious promises, and be made

partakers of thy heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

THE EPISTLE

I CORINTHIANS 15. 1

*Paul and God's grace*

Now, my brothers, I want to speak about the gospel which I have previously preached to you, which you accepted, in which you are at present standing, and by which, if you remain faithful to the message I gave you, your salvation is being worked out—unless, of course, your faith had no meaning behind it at all.

For I passed on to you—as among the first to hear it, the message I had myself received—that Christ died for our sins, as the scriptures said he would; that he was buried and rose again on the third day, again as the scriptures foretold. He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve, and subsequently he was seen simultaneously by over five hundred Christians, of whom the majority are still alive, though some have since died. He was then seen by James, then by all the messengers. And last of all, as if to one born abnormally late, he appeared to me! I am the least of the messengers, and indeed I do not deserve that title at all, because I persecuted the Church of God. But what I am now I am by the grace of God. The grace he gave me has not proved a barren gift. I have worked harder than any of the others—and yet it was not I but this same grace of God within me. In any event, whoever has done the work, whether I or they, this has been the message and this has been the foundation of your faith.

THE GOSPEL

ST. LUKE 18. 9

*Grace is given to the humble*

Jesus gave this illustration to certain people who were confident of their own goodness and looked down on others:

“Two men went up to the Temple to pray, one was a Pharisee, the other was a tax-collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed



like this with himself, 'O God, I do thank thee that I am not like the rest of mankind, greedy, dishonest, impure, or even like that tax-collector over there. I fast twice every week; I give away a tenth-part of all my income.' But the tax-collector stood in a distant corner, scarcely daring to look up to Heaven, and with a gesture of despair, said, 'God, have mercy on a sinner like me.' I assure you that he was the man who went home justified in God's sight, rather than the other one. For everyone who sets himself up as somebody will become a nobody, and the man who makes himself nobody will become somebody."

---

### The Grace of God

It is sometimes said that "we cannot lift ourselves up by our own bootlaces". No Christian can come anywhere near fulfilling God's purpose for his life entirely on his own; he needs the grace or help of God to see him through. This idea lies behind Collect, Epistle and Gospel.

\* \* \*

In the Collect we ask for all the help we need ("mercifully grant unto us such a measure of thy grace"), but this doesn't mean that we ourselves can then contract out: to give his grace full scope we must "run the way of his commandments".

\* \* \*

Notice too in the Epistle how Paul speaks of the vital part the grace of God had played in his life and work. "I have worked harder than any of the others—and yet it was not I but this same grace of God within me."

But there is more. How had he and other Christians come by this grace? His answer is through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus himself—a message kept central in the Church's life then and ever since through the sacrament of "the breaking of bread."

\* \* \*

The Gospel deserves the most careful study, for the parable in it sets down the conditions for true prayer and the grace and mercy which it brings from God. "God, have mercy on a sinner like me." If we are to receive Divine grace through our prayers, we must be completely frank and honest from the word "go". We must be humble too. It has been said that the gate of heaven is so low that no one can enter it except upon his knees!

## The Twelfth Sunday after Trinity

### THE COLLECT

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray, and art wont to give more than either we desire, or deserve; Pour down upon us the abundance of thy mercy; forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask, but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, thy Son, our Lord. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

### II CORINTHIANS 3. 4

#### *The splendour of our ministry*

We dare to say such things because of the confidence we have in God through Christ. Not that we are in any way confident of our own resources—our ability comes from God. It is he who makes us competent administrators of the new agreement, and we deal not in the letter but in the Spirit. The letter of the Law leads to the death of the soul; the Spirit of God alone can give life to the soul.

The administration of the Law which was engraved in stone (and which led in fact to spiritual death) was so magnificent that the Israelites were unable to look unflinchingly at Moses' face, for it was alight with heavenly splendour. Now if the old administration held such heavenly, even though transitory,

splendour, can we not see what a much more glorious thing is the new administration of the Spirit of life? If to administer a system which is to end in condemning men was a splendid task, how infinitely more splendid is it to administer a system which ends in making men good! And while it is true that the former temporary glory has been completely eclipsed by the latter, we do well to remember that it is eclipsed simply because the present permanent plan is such a very much more glorious thing than the old.

THE GOSPEL

ST. MARK 7. 31

*Jesus restores speech and hearing*

Once more Jesus left the neighbourhood of Tyre and passed through Sidon towards the Lake of Galilee, and crossed the Ten Towns territory. They brought to him a man who was deaf and unable to speak intelligibly, and they implored him to put his hand upon him. Jesus took him away from the crowd by himself. He put his fingers in the man's ears and touched his tongue with his own saliva. Then, looking up to Heaven, he gave a deep sigh and said to him in Aramaic:

"Open!"

And his ears were opened and immediately whatever had tied his tongue came loose and he spoke quite plainly. Jesus gave instructions that they should tell no one about this happening, but the more he told them, the more they broadcast the news. People were absolutely amazed, and kept saying:

"How wonderfully he has done everything! He even makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak."

---

### The Personal Touch

(Note: "whereof" = of which; "wont" = accustomed.)

Our starting point today is God's care for each of his children, so important in the teaching of Jesus. The Collect takes us



straight back to the parable of the loving father (Luke 15) which, surprisingly, finds no place among the Gospel selections for the Christian year. (This background to the Collect would have been easier to see if Cranmer had not altered the original words of the Latin prayer which, when translated, reads "O God, who in the abundance of thy fatherly compassion art" etc., into "who art more ready" etc.) The prodigal son was given more than he "desired" (asked for) or "deserved"; he received full and free forgiveness; gifts were showered upon him; but his great moment came when he felt his father's arms around him and knew that the broken relationships were restored. Love in action had made this possible.

\* \* \*

The personal touch comes out again in the Gospel. No doubt this was the only way to let the deaf man know that his healing was a gift from Christ, but at the same time what Jesus did was in the Father's name and showed the Father's close personal concern for the deaf mute.

\* \* \*

The Epistle takes a wider view. For both Paul and his fellow-missionaries God's care and concern for men was proved when Jesus Christ came into the world. Their "confidence" was "in God through Christ". Paul was always saying the "new agreement" was *new*! Christianity had not evolved from earlier religions, but was something fresh given by God, and not discovered by men. It was a personal relationship (in the Spirit) not a whole lot of written rules like the law of Moses. The system of Moses (which could not give life because it only laid down rules and had no power to see them carried out) had its own splendour (Exodus 34. 29), but it did not last; the new system is a relationship with God "which ends in making men good" and is made possible only "through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ".

## The Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity

### THE COLLECT

ALMIGHTY and merciful God, of whose only gift it cometh that thy faithful people do unto thee true and laudable service; Grant, we beseech thee, that we may so faithfully serve thee in this life, that we fail not finally to attain thy heavenly promises; through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

GALATIANS 3. 16

#### *The promises of God*

Let me give you an everyday illustration, my brothers.

Now the promises were made to Abraham and his seed. (Note in passing that the scripture says not "seeds" but uses the singular "seed", meaning Christ.) I say then that the Law, which came into existence four hundred and thirty years later, cannot render null and void the original "contract" which God had made, and thus rob the promise of its value. For if the receiving of the promised blessing were now made to depend on the Law, that would amount to a cancellation of the original "contract" which God made with Abraham as a promise.

Where then lies the point of the Law? It was an addition made to underline the existence and extent of sin until the arrival of the "seed" to whom the promise referred. The Law was inaugurated in the presence of angels and by the hand of a human intermediary. The very fact that there was an intermediary is enough to show that this was not the fulfilling of the promise. For the promise of God needs neither angelic witness nor human intermediary but depends on him alone.

Is the Law then to be looked upon as a contradiction of the promise? Certainly not, for if there could have been a law which gave men spiritual life then that law would have produced righteousness (which would have been, of course, in full harmony with the purpose of the promise). But, as things are, the

scripture has all men "imprisoned" for their sins, because they are found guilty by the Law, that to men in such condition the promise might come to release all who believe in Jesus Christ.

THE GOSPEL

ST. LUKE 10. 23

*The law and actual living*

Jesus turned to his disciples and said to them quietly:

"How fortunate you are to see what you are seeing! I tell you that many prophets and kings have wanted to see what you are seeing but they never saw it, and to hear what you are hearing but they never heard it."

Then one of the experts in the Law stood up to test him and said:

"Master, what must I do to be sure of eternal life?"

"What does the Law say and what has your reading taught you?" said Jesus.

"The Law says, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy strength and with all thy mind—and thy neighbour as thyself'," he replied.

"Quite right," said Jesus. "Do that and you will live."

But the man, wanting to justify himself, continued:

"But who is my 'neighbour'?"

And Jesus gave him the following reply:

"A man was once on his way down from Jerusalem to Jericho. He fell into the hands of bandits who stripped off his clothes, beat him up, and left him half dead. It so happened that a priest was going down the road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. A Levite also came on the scene and when he saw him, he too passed by on the other side. But then a Samaritan traveller came along to the place where the man was lying, and at the sight of him he was touched with pity. He went across to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put him on his own mule, brought him to an inn and did what he could for him. Next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the inn-keeper with the words, 'Look



after him, will you? I will pay you back whatever more you spend, when I come through here on my return.' Which of these three seems to you to have been a neighbour to the bandits' victim?"

"The man who gave him practical sympathy," he replied.

"Then you go and give the same," returned Jesus.

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## The Service of Love

(Note "laudable" = worthy of praise, commendable.)

In the Collect we ask God for grace to serve him faithfully. One of the finest ways of serving our Heavenly Father is by being kind to some of his other children, like the Good Samaritan in the Gospel. In the end the two great commandments—love of God and love of my neighbour—become one, because they cannot exist without each other. "God *is* love and the man whose life is lived in love does, in fact, live in God, and God does, in fact, live in him."

\* \* \*

The Epistle is one of the most difficult passages in the Bible and it is hard to see why it should have been chosen at all. (In the 1928 Prayer Book some verses from Hebrews 13 are suggested as an alternative.) It is hoped that the following summary of the argument will help the reader.

*First stage.* God made a promise to Abraham that through him and his "seed" (his descendants) all the families of the earth would be blessed. (Paul has his own way of interpreting the scriptures which isn't ours, the use of "seed" not "seeds" proving to his mind that the promise looked forward to and meant Christ.)

*Second stage.* Then came the Jewish law under Moses 430 years later; it didn't fulfil the promise, and whatever else it did it couldn't interfere with the original promise to Abraham, which remained binding. Why then did the law come about

at all? Paul's answer is, "because of sin". Paul pictured life in Abraham's day as a sort of golden age of obedience and close and constant friendship with God. But this didn't last and the disobedience which followed meant strict rules which removed God further away. He was no longer the loving friend he had been to Abraham.

*Third stage.* The fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham came about not through any intermediary like Moses, but through the coming of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. This is the Gospel. Those who believe in him are the inheritors of the blessings promised to Abraham and his "seed".

Perhaps we can now see how this somewhat obscure passage throws light on the main stream of the day's teaching. The Christian is under "the Gospel"; he will *not*—as many unhappily still do, even within the Church—make his life simply a matter of keeping a lot of rules. That would be legalism. For him the Christian life is a life lived in a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ, and he will learn to love his neighbour (and in doing so, God too), not because he has to, but because he wants to.

## The Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity

### THE COLLECT

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, give unto us the increase of faith, hope, and charity; and, that we may obtain that which thou dost promise, make us to love that which thou dost command; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

GALATIANS 5. 16

### *Life in the spirit*

Here is my advice. Live your whole life in the Spirit and you will not satisfy the desires of your lower nature. For the whole

energy of the lower nature is set against the Spirit, while the whole power of the Spirit is contrary to the lower nature. Here is the conflict, and that is why you are not free to do what you want to do. But if you follow the leading of the Spirit, you stand clear of the Law.

The activities of the lower nature are obvious. Here is a list: sexual immorality, impurity of mind, sensuality, worship of false gods, witchcraft, hatred, quarrelling, jealousy, bad temper, rivalry, factions, party-spirit, envy, drunkenness, orgies and things like that. I solemnly assure you, as I did before, that those who indulge in such things will never inherit God's kingdom. The Spirit, however, produces in human life fruits such as these: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, fidelity, tolerance and self-control—and no law exists against any of them.

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified their old nature with all that it loved and lusted for.

#### THE GOSPEL

ST. LUKE 17. 11

#### *Kindness meets with little gratitude*

In the course of his journey to Jerusalem, Jesus crossed the boundary between Samaria and Galilee, and as he was approaching a village, ten lepers met him. They kept their distance but shouted out:

"Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"

When Jesus saw them, he said:

"Go and show yourselves to the priests."

And it happened that as they went on their way they were cured. One of their number, when he saw that he was cured, turned round and praised God at the top of his voice, and then fell on his face before Jesus and thanked him. This man was a Samaritan. And at this Jesus remarked:

"Weren't there ten men healed? Where are the other nine? Is nobody going to turn and praise God for what has been done, except this stranger?"



And he said to the man:

"Stand up now, and go on your way. It is your faith that has made you well."

---

## Giving the Glory to God

(For the meaning of "charity" see the notes for Quinquagesima, p. 79 )

"The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him for ever" (Scottish Catechism). Prayer Book teaching is constantly in line with this. It has no room for any but a God-centred life. This is what Paul means in the Epistle by "life in the Spirit" (capital S means the Holy Spirit). It is all the time at war with our "lower nature".

We may feel, in studying Paul's two lists showing "which is which", that we don't come out of it particularly well. (News-papers suggest that nationally we don't come out of it particularly well either; though evil is always "news", good rarely is.) But the point about Christians is that despite their failures they are committed to the God-centred life. "Those who belong to Christ have crucified their old nature with all that it loved and lusted for." They may not be there yet, but at least they're on the way! (See the second half of the Collect.)

\* \* \*

In this line of thought the Gospel takes its place. Whether the nine were grateful or not, only one did anything about it. He alone was found "to give glory to God". The first step towards a God-centred life is to become aware of God's bounties and blessings.

\* \* \*

In the Collect we ask for help in our effort to live the God-centred life, to grow towards the ideal set out in the first sentence of these notes. Faith should all the time be growing stronger, hope surer and love deeper. We were never meant to "stay put" or be too easily satisfied. In this respect the Christian might well take a leaf out of the Communist's book!

## The Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity

### THE COLLECT

**K**EEP, we beseech thee, O Lord, thy Church with thy perpetual mercy: and, because the frailty of man without thee cannot but fall, keep us ever by thy help from all things hurtful, and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

GALATIANS 6. 11

*The power of Christ matters above all*

Look at these huge letters I am making in writing these words to you with my own hand!\*

These men who are always urging you to be circumcised—what are they after? They want to present a pleasing front to the world and they want to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. For even those who have been circumcised do not themselves keep the Law. But they want you circumcised so that they may be able to boast about your submission to their ruling. Yet God forbid that I should boast about anything or anybody except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, which means that the world is a dead thing to me and I am a dead man to the world. But in Christ it is not circumcision or uncircumcision that counts but the power of new birth. To all who live by this principle, to the true Israel of God, may there be peace and mercy!

Let no one interfere with me after this. I carry on my scarred body the marks of Jesus.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, my brothers, be with your spirit.

PAUL.

\* According to centuries-old Eastern usage, this could easily mean, "Note how heavily I have pressed upon the pen in writing this." Thus it could be translated, "Notice how heavily I underline these words to you".

*Put your trust in God alone*

"No one can be loyal to two masters. He is bound to hate one and love the other, or support one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and the power of money at the same time. That is why I say to you, don't worry about living—wondering what you are going to eat or drink, or what you are going to wear. Surely life is more important than food, and the body more important than the clothes you wear. Look at the birds in the sky. They never sow nor reap nor store away in barns, and yet your Heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you much more valuable to him than they are? Can any of you, however much he worries, make himself an inch taller? And why do you worry about clothes? Consider how the wild flowers grow. They neither work nor weave, but I tell you that even Solomon in all his glory was never arrayed like one of these! Now if God so clothes the flowers of the field, which are alive today and burnt in the stove tomorrow, is he not much more likely to clothe you, you 'little-faiths'?"

"So don't worry and don't keep saying, 'What shall we eat, what shall we drink or what shall we wear?'! That is what pagans are always looking for; your Heavenly Father knows that you need them all. Set your heart on his kingdom and his goodness, and all these things will come to you as a matter of course.

"Don't worry at all then about tomorrow. Tomorrow can take care of itself! One day's trouble is enough for one day."

---

### Undivided Loyalty

Everyone is familiar with such sayings as "running with the hare and hunting with the hounds", "having a foot in both camps", and "making the best of both worlds". As far as religion is concerned, said Jesus, this is impossible; "You cannot serve God and the power of money at the same time."



One or other must come out on top. There is a necessary place for "material things", but it is a question of "first things first". "Set your heart on his kingdom and his goodness, and all these things will come to you as a matter of course."

\* \* \*

In the Epistle Paul nails his colours to the mast in no uncertain way. "God forbid that I should boast about anything or anybody except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, which means that the world is a dead thing to me and I am a dead man to the world." This and the other verses of the Epistle were important to Paul, for he seems to have taken the pen out of his secretary's hand and written them himself and written them "big", as we might do a poster or placard.

He tells us that there were some in the Church who wanted a half-way house, advocating circumcision to keep in with the Jews as well as the Christians. They wanted a foot in both camps, and by being "yes men" to avoid having a rough time with their own fellow Jews. But there could be no divided loyalties where Christ was concerned and no compromise between the Jew and the Christian. (Note that by the "true Israel of God", Paul means the Christian Church.)

\* \* \*

The Collect's connection with this is not hard to see. Christians know their frailty (weakness) only too well and how soon divided loyalties creep in, so it is natural to pray that God will keep his Church secure in order that through its continuing life each one may find the protection and guidance he needs.

But the original Latin Collect translated by Cranmer was all the way through a prayer for the Church ("keep it . . . lead it . . ."). If we use the prayer in this way, we shall ask that the Church—though *in* the world—may be kept free from worldliness and too much concern with position, wealth and influence; that it may operate in a world at peace (being kept from all things hurtful), and may be led to serve with undivided loyalty and unstinted devotion the cause of the Kingdom of God.

## The Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity

### THE COLLECT

**O** LORD, we beseech thee, let thy continual pity cleanse and defend thy Church; and, because it cannot continue in safety without thy succour, preserve it evermore by thy help and goodness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

EPHESIANS 3. 13

#### *The power within us*

In view of these tremendous issues, I beg you not to lose heart because I am now suffering for my part in bringing you the gospel. Indeed, you should be honoured.

When I think of the greatness of this great plan I fall on my knees before the Father (from whom all fatherhood, earthly or heavenly, derives its name), and I pray that out of the glorious richness of his resources he will enable you to know the strength of the Spirit's inner re-inforcement—that Christ may actually live in your hearts by your faith. And I pray that you, firmly fixed in love yourselves, may be able to grasp (with all Christians) how wide and deep and long and high is the love of Christ—and to know for yourselves that love so far beyond our comprehension. May you be filled through all your being with God himself!

Now to him who by his power within us is able to do infinitely more than we ever dare to ask or imagine—to him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever, amen!

### THE GOSPEL

ST. LUKE 7. 11

#### *The compassion of Christ*

Not long afterwards, Jesus went into a town called Nain, accompanied by his disciples and a large crowd. As they approached the city gate, it happened that some people were carrying out a dead man, the only son of his widowed mother.

The usual crowd of fellow-townsmen was with her. When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said:

"Don't cry."

Then he walked up and put his hand on the bier while the bearers stood still. Then he said:

"Young man, *wake up!*"

And the dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus handed him to his mother. Everybody present was awe-struck and they praised God, saying:

"A great prophet has arisen among us and God has turned his face towards his people."

And this report of him spread through the whole of Judaea and the surrounding countryside.

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## Divine Sympathy

(Note: "succour" = help.)

We know sympathy as a feeling to which we often give expression in letters and otherwise. Sometimes it is less than genuine and the false is mixed up with the true. But there is one sure test of genuineness, and that is when sympathy is translated into action. A Quaker was once told a "hard luck" story; he said: "My sympathy is £5. How much is thine?"

Divine sympathy is the subject of today's selections—a sympathy spot-lighted by what God has done and still does on our behalf.

\* \* \*

In the Collect we ask God not simply for continual sympathy or pity, but because we know him as revealed in Jesus, for three acts of pity—a Church cleansed, a Church defended and a Church kept steadily on a course it cannot chart for itself. (In the original Latin Collect the word used here is *gubernare*, suggesting the picture of God as the pilot or helmsman controlling the ship.)

\* \* \*



The Gospel betrays the deep compassion of Christ. Divine sympathy is expressed in the words "his heart went out to her", and it was followed by immediate action.

\* \* \*

In the Epistle Paul asks that his Ephesian readers may come to know the sympathy of Christ, which through the power of the Holy Spirit can become a power in their lives. "I pray that you, firmly fixed in love yourselves, may be able to grasp (with all Christians) how wide and deep and long and high is the love of Christ—and to know that love for yourselves. May you be filled through all your being with God himself!"

## The Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity

### THE COLLECT

**L**ORD, we pray thee that thy grace may always prevent and follow us, and make us continually to be given to all good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

EPHESIANS 4. 1

*We must be at one, as God is one*

As God's prisoner, then, I beg you to live lives worthy of your high calling. Accept life with humility and patience, making allowances for each other because you love each other. Make it your aim to be at one in the Spirit, and you will inevitably be at peace with one another. You all belong to one body, of which there is one Spirit, just as you all experienced one calling to one hope. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God, one Father of us all, who is the one over all, the one working through all and the one living in all.

*A lesson in humility*

One Sabbath day Jesus went into the house of one of the leading Pharisees for a meal, and they were all watching him closely. Right in front of him was a man afflicted with dropsy. So Jesus spoke to the scribes and Pharisees and said:

“Well, is it right to heal on the Sabbath day or not?”

But there was no reply. So Jesus took the man and healed him and let him go. Then he said to them:

“If an ass or a cow belonging to one of you fell into a well, wouldn’t you rescue him without the slightest hesitation even though it were the Sabbath?”

And this again left them quite unable to reply.

Then he gave a little word of advice to the guests when he noticed how they were choosing the best seats.

“When you are invited to a wedding reception, don’t sit down in the best seat. It might happen that a more distinguished man than you has also been invited. Then your host might say, ‘I am afraid you must give up your seat for this man.’ And then, with considerable embarrassment, you will have to sit in the humblest place. No, when you are invited, go and take your seat in an inconspicuous place, so that when your host comes in he may say to you, ‘Come on, my dear fellow, we have a much better seat than this for you.’ That is the way to be important in the eyes of all your fellow-guests! For everyone who makes himself important will become insignificant, while the man who makes himself insignificant will find himself important.”

---

### Christian Humility

(Note: “prevent” = go before, lead the way.)

The Christian virtue of humility is in short supply today. It is not rated very high in popular favour, possibly because it is wrongly mixed up with a spineless, “meek and mild” attitude

that will not come to terms with life, but much more because what men praise is self-assertiveness, "push". "Blow your own trumpet, for nobody else will blow it for you." This is not really surprising; humility is out of place in a self-centred world. But it can never be this way for the Christian whose life is God-centred, not self-centred; he will remember the very first thing Jesus said in his teaching on the mountain, "Happy are the humble-minded, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs!"

\* \* \*

All this and more lies behind the Gospel, where we find our Lord giving the Pharisees a lesson in humility. They certainly needed it, not only for their behaviour at table, but also for their general "bossiness"—in their pride laying down rules for others which they didn't apply to themselves and which God had never sanctioned. (If they staged the incident of the man with dropsy, they certainly got more that day than they bargained for!)

\* \* \*

Paul in the Epistle makes the same point: "Accept life with humility." This granted, patience, forbearance, readiness to make allowances, peaceful relationships and above all, Christian unity are bound to follow.

\* \* \*

No one can read the latter part of the Epistle without becoming conscious of the disunited Church. Does this not suggest a "special intention" for the Collect—which might then be a prayer that God's grace may lead the way ("prevent") to Christian reunion, and follow behind to consolidate the gains? Reader, will you play your part?



## The Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity

### THE COLLECT

**L**ORD, we beseech thee, grant thy people grace to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and with pure hearts and minds to follow thee the only God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

I CORINTHIANS I. 4

#### *Grace in human life*

I am always thankful to God for what the gift of his grace in Christ Jesus has meant to you—how, as the Christian message has become established among you, he has enriched your whole lives, from the words on your lips to the understanding in your hearts. And you have been eager to receive his gifts during this time of waiting for his final appearance. He will keep you steadfast in the faith to the end, so that when his day comes you need fear no condemnation.

### THE GOSPEL

ST. MATTHEW 22. 34

#### *Christ and the law*

When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees they came up to him in a body, and one of them, an expert in the Law, put this test-question: "Master, what are we to consider the Law's greatest commandment?"

Jesus answered him, "'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul and with all thy mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And there is a second like it: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' The whole of the Law and the Prophets depends on these two commandments."

Then Jesus asked the assembled Pharisees this question: "What is your opinion about Christ? Whose son is he?"

"The Son of David," they answered.

"How then," returned Jesus, "does David when inspired by the Spirit call him Lord? He says—

The Lord said unto my *Lord*,  
Sit thou on my right hand,  
Till I put thine enemies underneath thy feet?

If David then calls him Lord, how can he be his son?"

Nobody was able to answer this and from that day on no one dared to ask him any further questions.

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## Christian Responsibility

(Note: "withstand" = stand up against.)

Every Christian at Baptism undertakes (1) to give up what is wrong (Renunciation); (2) to believe what is true (Faith); and (3) to do what is right (Obedience). These three promises lie behind the phrases of the Collect; the first is recalled by "grace to withstand" etc. and the other two by "with pure hearts" etc., for we seek for grace to follow God in his self-revelation—that is faith, and to follow him by doing his will—that is obedience.

\* \* \*

It has often been noticed that faith is really first in order among the promises, and this receives special attention in the Epistle. This new-found Christian faith (which had come to the Corinthians by the grace of God and which made Paul so happy) and enriched their "whole lives, from the words on their lips to the understanding in their hearts." They had begun to live the full life of baptised Christians. "God is utterly dependable", said Paul, adding in effect, "Go on doing your part; he will certainly do his!"

\* \* \*

The Gospel includes our Lord's summary of the Law. In a sense here the three baptismal promises are rolled into one, for

to love God fully, means always to give him first place, always to trust him completely and always to do what he asks. This last would certainly include loving one's neighbour as oneself—for his sake.

The Gospel then records our Lord's counter-question, added possibly to re-enforce the truth that a baptised Christian's life is only possible through Christ; at once David's Son—the Man Christ Jesus, and David's Lord—the risen and glorified Son of God. But this was not at all intended at the time. If our Lord's purpose was to show his challengers that they were not very bright as teachers, at the same time he was calling on them to think more deeply, especially on the true nature of the Messiah: "a king who reigns yet a servant who suffers; a descendant of David, yet his Lord; a human champion, yet a divine Redeemer."

## The Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity

### THE COLLECT

**O** GOD, forasmuch as without thee we are not able to please thee; Mercifully grant, that thy Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

EPHESIANS 4. 17

#### *Learn to lead the new life*

This is my instruction, then, which I give you from the Lord. Do not live any longer as the gentiles live. For they live blindfold in a world of illusion, and are cut off from the life of God through ignorance and insensitiveness. They have stifled their consciences and then surrendered themselves to sensuality,



practising any form of impurity which lust can suggest. But you have learned nothing like that from Christ, if you have really heard his voice and understood the truth that Jesus has taught you. No, what you learned was to fling off the dirty clothes of the old way of living, which were rotted through and through with lust's illusions, and, with yourselves mentally and spiritually re-made, to put on the clean fresh clothes of the new life which was made by God's design for righteousness and the holiness which is no illusion.

Finish, then, with lying and tell your neighbour the truth. For we are not separate units but intimately related to each other in Christ. If you are angry, be sure that it is not out of wounded pride or bad temper. Never go to bed angry—don't give the devil that sort of foothold.

If you used to be a thief you must not only give up stealing, but you must learn to make an honest living, so that you may be able to give to those in need.

Let there be no more foul language, but good words instead—words suitable for the occasion, which God can use to help other people. Never hurt the Holy Spirit. He is, remember, the personal pledge of your eventual full redemption.

Let there be no more resentment, no more anger or temper, no more violent self-assertiveness, no more slander and no more malicious remarks. Be kind to each other, be understanding. Be as ready to forgive others as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you.

THE GOSPEL

ST. MATTHEW 9. 1

*Jesus gives new life*

Jesus re-embarked on the boat, crossed the lake, and came to his own town. Immediately some people arrived bringing him a paralytic lying flat on his bed. When Jesus saw the faith of those who brought him he said to the paralytic, "Cheer up, my son! Your sins are forgiven."

At once some of the scribes thought to themselves: "This man

is blaspheming." But Jesus realised what they were thinking, and said to them, "Why must you have such evil thoughts in your minds? Do you think it is easier to say to this man, 'Your sins are forgiven' or 'Get up and walk'? But to make it quite plain that the Son of Man has full authority on earth to forgive sins"—and here he spoke to the paralytic—"Get up, pick up your bed and go home." And the man sprang to his feet and went home. When the crowds saw what had happened they were filled with awe and praised God for giving such power to men.

---

### The New Life

In a first century Greek town Christians stood out from non-Christians in sharp contrast; there could be no question who was who. What the Christians had learned, Paul tells us, was "to fling off the dirty clothes of the old way of living," and "to put on the clean fresh clothes of the new life which was made by God's design."

He then pictures this working out in everyday situations. There is nothing "up in the air" about the verses which follow in the Epistle; they discuss things about which many people—even good Christians—say, "Why shouldn't I? Everybody does it"; and make us feel that our Christian standards don't show up too well when compared with those of the first century.

\* \* \*

We may suppose a new life also for the paralysed man of the Gospel story—new life through the healing of his body, but an even deeper new life through the forgiveness of his sins. Christianity is and must be concerned with the "outer life"—with racial tolerance, housing, labour conditions and so on, precisely because physical conditions of life so powerfully help or hinder the pursuit of the good life. But underlying all these

there is the deeper need of spiritual healing and reconciliation with God.

\* \* \*

The Giver and Sustainer of this new life in Christ is the Holy Spirit, and so we pray in the Collect that he may continue his gracious work by "directing and ruling our hearts".

## The Twentieth Sunday after Trinity

### THE COLLECT

**O** ALMIGHTY and most merciful God, of thy bountiful goodness keep us, we beseech thee, from all things that may hurt us; that we, being ready both in body and soul, may cheerfully accomplish those things that thou wouldest have done; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

EPHESIANS 5. 15

#### *Live life responsibly*

Live life, then, with a due sense of responsibility, not as men who do not know the meaning and purpose of life but as *those who do*. Make the best use of your time, despite all the difficulties of these days. Don't be vague but firmly grasp what you know to be the will of the Lord. Don't get your stimulus from wine (for there is always the danger of excessive drinking), but let the Spirit stimulate your souls. Express your joy in singing among yourselves psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, making music in your hearts for the ears of the Lord! Thank God at all times for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. And "fit in with" each other, because of your common reverence for Christ.



*The kingdom of God cannot be treated lightly*

Then Jesus began to talk to them again in parables.

"The kingdom of Heaven," he said, "is like a king who arranged a wedding for his son. He sent his servants to summon those who had been invited to the festivities, but they refused to come. Then he tried again; he sent some more servants, saying to them, 'Tell those who have been invited, "Here is my wedding-breakfast all ready, my bullocks and fat cattle have been slaughtered and everything is prepared. Come along to the festivities."' But they took no notice of this and went off, one to his farm, and another to his business. As for the rest, they got hold of the servants, treated them disgracefully, and finally killed them. At this the king was very angry and sent his troops and killed those murderers and burned down their city. Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is quite ready, but those who were invited were not good enough for it. So go off now to all the street corners and invite everyone you find there to the feast.' So the servants went out on to the streets and collected together all those whom they found, bad and good alike. And the hall became filled with guests. But when the king came in to inspect the guests, he noticed among them a man not dressed for a wedding. 'How did you come in here, my friend,' he said to him, 'without being properly dressed for the wedding?' And the man had nothing to say. Then the king said to the ushers, 'Tie him up and throw him into the darkness outside. There he can weep and regret his folly!' For many are invited but few are chosen."

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### Responsible Behaviour

(Note: "that thou wouldest have done" = what God wishes or expects to see carried out.)

How would you expect a Christian to show a "due sense of responsibility" today? Paul's first century ideas do not seem so

very wide of the mark! He sees the Christian showing it by the right use of time and opportunities (so often wasted), and of intelligence (so often occupied in worthless trifles); by moderation in personal habits; by churchgoing; by a cheerful, thankful disposition and by being a good neighbour.

\* \* \*

In its place here in the Prayer Book the Gospel parable illustrates *irresponsible* behaviour. The people in the story knew all about their invitation, and presumably had promised to come to the feast, but when the summons came they took no notice, and some turned really nasty. This couldn't be allowed to go on and the king ended it by inviting others. The invited guests had missed a chance which would never return to them. It is well that the Prayer Book should remind us that the Kingdom cannot be lightly disregarded.

(Note: this same parable is found in Luke in a different form and is used for the Gospel on Trinity 2. See the notes there. Most people think that the part at the end about the man not properly dressed for the wedding is really separate and part of some other parable, and tacked on here because it also has to do with a wedding feast. Though only a fragment, its meaning is clear; God's bounty is offered to all, but those who accept it accept standards of responsibility and behaviour that belong to God's way of life. To be "on" with God means being "off" with a great deal else.)

\* \* \*

The Collect, which is entirely in line with the thought for the day, is a prayer that we may be completely prepared—in body as well as in soul—to serve God cheerfully in every situation of daily life.

## The Twenty-first Sunday after Trinity

### THE COLLECT

**G**RANT, we beseech thee, merciful Lord, to thy faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins, and serve thee with a quiet mind; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

EPHESIANS 6. 10

#### *The spiritual conflict*

In conclusion, be strong—not in yourselves but in the Lord, in the power of his boundless resource. Put on God's complete armour so that you can successfully resist all the devil's methods of attack. For our fight is not against any physical enemy: it is against organisations and powers that are spiritual. We are up against the unseen power that controls this dark world, and spiritual agents from the very headquarters of evil. Therefore you must wear the whole armour of God that you may be able to resist evil in its day of power, and that even when you have fought to a standstill you may still stand your ground. Take your stand then with truth as your belt, righteousness your breastplate, the gospel of peace firmly on your feet, salvation as your helmet and in your hand the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. Above all be sure you take faith as your shield, for it can quench every burning missile the enemy hurls at you. Pray at all times with every kind of spiritual prayer, keeping alert and persistent as you pray for all Christ's men and women. And pray for me, too, that I may be able to speak freely here to make known the secret of that gospel for which I am, so to speak, an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may speak out about it as is my plain and obvious duty.



*Jesus heals in response to faith*

At Capernaum there was an official whose son was very ill. When he heard that Jesus had left Judaea and had arrived in Galilee, he went off to see him and begged him to come down and heal his son, who was by this time at the point of death.

Jesus said to him, "I suppose you will never believe unless you see signs and wonders!"

"Sir," returned the official, "please come down before my boy dies!"

"You can go home," returned Jesus, "your son is alive and well."

And the man believed what Jesus had said to him and went on his way.

On the journey back his servants met him with the report: "Your son is alive and well." So he asked them at what time he had begun to recover, and they replied: "The fever left him yesterday at one o'clock in the afternoon." Then the father knew that this must have happened at the very moment when Jesus had said to him, "Your son is alive and well." And he and his whole household believed in Jesus. This, then, was the second sign that Jesus gave on his return from Judaea to Galilee.

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### Inward Peace

The Collect prays for God's "faithful people"—which we take to mean (1) those who trust God, (2) those whom God can trust, on whom he can rely. The prayer is for pardon and peace, and they rightly go together. Peace here does not mean so much the end of war and strife in the world around us as the inner state of mind which comes from being "right with God", at one with him, united in fellowship with him. Such a peace as

this would not be possible without, first, pardon, implying our confession and God's free forgiveness.

\* \* \*

The Epistle reminds us that to have found peace with God does not mean the end of "all our striving"; indeed it may only make the conflict fiercer. For it we shall need the whole armour of God, and above all constant, sincere and purposeful prayer. But whatever the issues of the spiritual struggle (of which we see only a tiny part) the inner peace remains and we can serve God with a quiet mind.

\* \* \*

The Collect makes it clear that only God's "faithful people" find peace; the Gospel tells the story of a man who found peace through his growing faith. He began with faith in Christ's power (that was why he came), in his compassion (that was why he asked), and in his authority (that was why he did what he was told); but he ended by finding complete faith and trust in Jesus himself. "He and his whole household believed in Jesus."

## The Twenty-second Sunday after Trinity

### THE COLLECT

**L**ORD, we beseech thee to keep thy household the Church in continual godliness; that through thy protection it may be free from all adversities, and devoutly given to serve thee in good works, to the glory of thy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

### PHILIPPIANS I. 3

#### *Paul's joy in his converts*

I thank my God for you Christians at Philippi whenever I think of you. My constant prayers for you are a real joy, for they bring

back to my mind how we have worked together for the gospel from the earliest days until now. I feel sure that the one who has begun his good work in you will go on developing it until the day of Jesus Christ.

It is only natural that I should feel like this about you all—you are very dear to me. For during the time I was in prison as well as when I was out defending and demonstrating the power of the gospel we shared together the grace of God. God knows how much I long, with the deepest Christian love and affection, for your companionship. My prayer for you is that you may have still more love—a love that is full of knowledge and wise insight. I want you to be able always to recognise the highest and the best, and to live sincere and blameless lives until the day of Christ. I want to see your lives full of true goodness, produced by the power that Jesus Christ gives you to the praise and glory of God.

THE GOSPEL

ST. MATTHEW 18. 21

*The necessity for forgiveness*

Peter approached Jesus with the question, "Master, how many times can my brother wrong me and I must forgive him? Would seven times be enough?"

"No," replied Jesus, "not seven times, but seventy times seven! For the kingdom of Heaven is like a king who decided to settle his accounts with his servants. When he had started calling in his accounts, a man was brought to him who owed him millions of pounds. And when it was plain that he had no means of repaying the debt, his master gave orders for him to be sold as a slave, and his wife and children and all his possessions as well, and the money to be paid over. At this the servant fell on his knees before his master, 'Oh, be patient with me!' he cried, 'and I will pay you back every penny!' Then his master was moved with pity for him, set him free and cancelled his debt.

"But when this same servant had left his master's presence, he



found one of his fellow-servants who owed him a few shillings. He grabbed him and seized him by the throat, crying, 'Pay up what you owe me!' At this his fellow-servant fell down at his feet, and implored him, 'Oh, be patient with me, and I will pay you back!' But he refused and went out and had him put in prison until he should repay the debt.

"When the other fellow-servants saw what had happened, they were horrified and went and told their master the whole incident. Then his master called him in.

"'You wicked servant!' he said. 'Didn't I cancel all that debt when you begged me to do so? Oughtn't you to have taken pity on your fellow-servant as I, your master, took pity on you?' And his master in anger handed him over to the gaolers till he should repay the whole debt. This is how my Heavenly Father will treat you unless you each forgive your brother from your heart."

---

### The Family Pattern

"He's growing just like his father!" Perhaps you have said that about someone; perhaps it has been said about you. The speaker may mean that the son takes after the father in looks, in the way he walks or in some other of his habits.

To grow like our Father should be the aim of all who belong to the family of God—to his household the Church (Collect), which we pray God may keep in "continual godliness." Continual godliness! Shall we say "god-likeness" or "Father-likeness"? Here lies the clue to understanding both Epistle and Gospel.

\*       \*       \*

The Philippians mentioned in the Epistle were true children of God their heavenly Father. There was a family likeness about their behaviour. They shared in all their Father's plans and purposes, and had worked together with Paul for the Gospel.

No doubt there were disagreements—Euodias and Syntyche had to be asked to make up their differences—but there were no quarrels, no open ruptures; the church was big enough to include them all. Is the church you belong to like this? If not, will you help to make it so?

But the Philippians were not to rest on their laurels. They were to “go on developing”. God’s children should never be content to stay as they are. It doesn’t all stop when we are confirmed or when we leave school, but all through our lives we are meant to go on growing more like God, and this we do, Paul says, “by the power that Jesus Christ gives”.

\* \* \*

The Gospel parable shows that God’s children must be like their heavenly Father by being ready to forgive, though it will be a small enough sacrifice when measured against his unending mercy, like “shillings” against “millions”.

It is hard to forgive those who have wronged us, but as Christians we must. A negro girl who became a Christian during a mission once said, “Through this mission I have found the love of Jesus Christ—and he has made me able to forgive the man who murdered my father.”

It is *not* being god-like to build up within ourselves a little chapel of hate and say, “I can never forget or forgive.” How then could we pray, “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us?”

“We do pray for mercy;  
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render  
The deeds of mercy.”

## The Twenty-third Sunday after Trinity

### THE COLLECT

**O** GOD, our refuge and strength, who art the author of all godliness; Be ready, we beseech thee, to hear the devout prayers of thy Church; and grant that those things which we ask faithfully we may obtain effectually; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

PHILIPPIANS 3. 17

#### *The unlimited horizon*

Let me be your example here, my brothers: let my example be the standard by which you can tell who are the genuine Christians among those about you. For there are many, of whom I have told you before and tell you again now, even with tears, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ. These men are heading for utter destruction—their god is their own appetite, their pride is in what they should be ashamed of, and this world is the limit of their horizon. But we are citizens of Heaven; our outlook goes beyond this world to the hopeful expectation of the saviour who will come from Heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will change these wretched bodies of ours so that they resemble his own glorious body, by that power of his which makes him the master of everything that is.

### THE GOSPEL

ST. MATTHEW 22. 15

#### *Duty to God and man*

Then the Pharisees went off and discussed how they could trap him in argument. Eventually they sent their disciples with some of the Herod-party to say this, "Master, we know that you are an honest man who teaches the way of God faithfully and that you are not swayed by men's opinion of you. Obviously you don't care for human approval. Now tell us—*Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?*"



But Jesus knowing their evil intention said, "Why try this trick on me, you frauds? Show me the money you pay the tax with." They handed him a coin, and he said to them, "Whose face is this and whose name is in the inscription?"

"Caesar's," they said.

"Then give to Caesar," he replied, "what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God!"

This reply staggered them and they went away and let him alone.

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## In Two Kingdoms

(Note: "author" = source, starter: "devout" = earnest, sincere: "faithfully" = in faith: "effectually" = completely, wholly.)

Every Christian belongs to some country or other (except those unhappily known as "displaced persons") and owes it a loyalty. He also belongs to the Kingdom of God and owes it loyalty too. Both Epistle and Gospel are about this.

\* \* \*

Take an example. Two men both work hard at their job, both love wife and children and both do all they can to improve their standard of living. In each home there is a television set, a radio and a washing machine—and a car for family use. One of the two men is completely absorbed by all this; it takes up all his time and "this world" as Paul says, "is the limit of his horizon".

The other man is deeply interested in his work and home too, but *not as ends in themselves*. In them, as in every part of his life, he remembers that he is first and foremost the child of God, a member of Christ's Church and a "citizen of Heaven". His "outlook goes beyond this world"; God comes first and he can always find time to give to God—especially for public worship on Sundays.

The "genuine Christian" thus is seen to have a double

citizenship—on earth and in heaven—and he recognises the duties which belong to each.

\* \* \*

The Gospel is on the same topic and shows our Lord dealing with the claims of Caesar and of God. "Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God!" And when the two conflict with each other and "Caesar" demands what belongs to God, the genuine Christian has no doubt of the answer. Peter gave it long ago: "We must obey God rather than men."

\* \* \*

The Collect is a prayer for the "genuine Christian", the citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven; that not only his own prayers, but the prayers of the whole Church may be rightly offered and overwhelmingly answered.

## The Twenty-fourth Sunday after Trinity

### THE COLLECT

**O** LORD, we beseech thee, absolve thy people from their offences; that through thy bountiful goodness we may all be delivered from the bands of those sins, which by our frailty we have committed: Grant this, O heavenly Father, for Jesus Christ's sake, our blessed Lord and Saviour. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

### COLOSSIANS I. 3

#### *The resources of God*

I want you to know by this letter that we here are constantly praying for you, and whenever we do we thank God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ because you believe in Christ Jesus and because you are showing true Christian love towards other Christians. We know that you are showing these qualities because you have grasped the hope reserved for you in Heaven—

that hope which first became yours when the truth was brought to you. It is, of course, part of the gospel itself, which has reached you as it spreads all over the world. Wherever that gospel goes, it produces Christian character, and develops it, as it has done in your own case from the time you first heard and realised the truth of God's grace.

You learned these things, we understand, from Epaphras, who is in the same service as we are. He is a most well-loved minister of Christ, and has your well-being very much at heart. As a matter of fact, it was from him that we heard about your growth in Christian love, so you will understand that since we heard about you we have never missed you in our prayers. We are asking God that you may see things, as it were, from his point of view by being given spiritual insight and understanding. We also pray that your outward lives, which men see, may bring credit to your master's name, and that you may bring joy to his heart by bearing genuine Christian fruit, and that your knowledge of God may grow yet deeper.

As you live this new life, we pray that you will be strengthened from God's boundless resources, so that you will find yourselves able to pass through any experience and endure it with joy. You will even be able to thank God in the midst of pain and distress because you are privileged to share the lot of those who are living in the light.

THE GOSPEL

ST. MATTHEW 9. 18

*Jesus restores health and life*

While Jesus was saying these things to his disciples an official came up to him and, bowing low before him, said:

"My daughter has just this moment died. Please come and lay your hands on her and she will come back to life!"

At this Jesus got to his feet and followed him, accompanied by his disciples. And on the way a woman who had had a haemorrhage for twelve years approached him from behind and touched the edge of his cloak.



"If I can only touch his cloak," she kept saying to herself, "I shall be all right."

But Jesus turned right round and saw her.

"Cheer up, my daughter," he said, "your faith has made you well!" And the woman was completely cured from that moment.

Then when Jesus came into the official's house and noticed the flute-players and the noisy crowd he said: "You must all go outside; the little girl is not dead, she is fast asleep."

This was met with scornful laughter. But when Jesus had forced the crowd to leave, he came right into the room, took hold of her hand, and the girl got up. And this became the talk of the whole district.

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### Living the New Life

In the Collect we ask our heavenly Father to assure his people of forgiveness; this is what "absolve" means. We ask it "for Jesus Christ's sake, our blessed Lord and Saviour".

He died that we might be forgiven,  
He died to make us good.

What was won at such great cost should never be lightly esteemed.

Absolution (being absolved), however, is not the end, but a beginning, and so we ask, secondly, for God's helping hand—his "bountiful goodness"—to set us free and "deliver" us from the chains or "bands" of our sins so that we may "live the new life". God forgives that he may restore. We are "saved to serve". The Collect's meaning could then be put in this way: "Speak pardon and peace to our consciences, Lord, that we may be set at liberty to serve you and begin to live the new life."

\* \* \*

The new life is also the theme of the Gospel. The people

concerned were different in every way but their needs were the same; it was restored life they wanted, and restored life they received.

\* \* \*

Paul is concerned with the same ideas in the Epistle, from Colossians. (He had never visited the Church at Colossae, which had been founded by Epaphras. We may suppose that Epaphras had just come to Rome and had given Paul a most glowing account of the Colossian Church.)

"Wherever the Gospel goes it produces the Christian character and develops it." This Paul calls "the new life", and it is prayer, he tells the Colossians, that they may have the insight to see things from God's point of view; that their lives shall be a credit to the Master's name; and that God's boundless resources will make them tough enough to face any test life may bring.

## The Twenty-fifth Sunday after Trinity

### THE COLLECT

STIR up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people; that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may of thee be plenteously rewarded; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

### FOR THE EPISTLE

JEREMIAH 23. 5

### *The coming King*

See, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will cause a new shoot to spring out of David. He will reign as king, he will rule wisely, and he will establish justice and fair-dealing in the land. Under his rule Judah shall be safe, and Israel shall live securely. The name that will be given to him is this: THE LORD IS OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS. So, therefore, the days are coming, says the Lord, when men shall no longer say,

"As surely as the Lord lives who brought the Israelites out of the land of Egypt"! But, "As surely as the Lord lives who brought up and led forth the children of the house of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them!" And they shall live in their own land.

THE GOSPEL

ST. JOHN 6. 5

*Jesus meets men's needs*

Jesus, raising his eyes and seeing a great crowd on their way towards him, said to Philip, "Where can we buy food for these people to eat?" (He said this to test Philip, for he himself knew what he was going to do.)

"Ten pounds' worth of bread would not be enough for them," Philip replied, "even if they had only a little each."

Then Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, another disciple, put in: "There is a boy here who has five small barley loaves and a couple of fish, but what's the good of that for such a crowd?"

Then Jesus said, "Get the people to sit down."

There was plenty of grass there, and the men, some five thousand of them, sat down. Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks for them and distributed them to the people sitting on the grass, and he distributed the fish in the same way, giving them as much as they wanted. When they had eaten enough, Jesus said to his disciples, "Collect the pieces that are left over so that nothing is wasted."

So they did as he suggested and filled twelve baskets with the broken pieces of the five barley loaves, which were left over after the people had eaten! When the men saw this sign of Jesus' power, they kept saying, "This certainly is the Prophet who was to come into the world!"

*If there are any more Sundays before Advent Sunday, the Service of some of those Sundays that were omitted after the Epiphany shall be taken in to supply as many as are here wanting. And if there are fewer, the overplus may be omitted. Provided that this last Collect, Epistle, and Gospel shall always be used upon the Sunday next before Advent.*



## Our Service and God's Promise

This Sunday is called both the 25th Sunday after Trinity and (in the rubric) the "Sunday next before Advent". It is really a transition Sunday and looks both ways. The Collect looks back over the Trinity season and is a prayer for the stirring of Christian wills into action. It is as if the Church is saying to all her sons and daughters, "There; we have shown you during all these months how you ought to live; now, go to it!"

\* \* \*

The Epistle and Gospel on the other hand are linked with the Advent idea, the passage from Jeremiah speaking of God's promise of the Messiah, and the Gospel of its fulfilment—"This certainly is the Prophet who was to come into the world!" Thus the Christian year ends with a message of hope.

Jeremiah speaks of a new king springing up in David's line, like a green shoot from the roots of a sawn-down tree. The new king will be just and wise. Jeremiah's readers would know that he was drawing a sharp contrast with Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, a pathetically weak sovereign with no real confidence in God. Under the new king, Jeremiah foresees a reunited kingdom—Israel and Judah one once more. This wonderful time coming is a proof that God is still at work.

Although there was disaster all round him and his country was in ruins and everything seemed hopeless, Jeremiah never lost heart and he went on repeating his message. It found its fulfilment, as we know, in Jesus Christ, and even before the early Church became established, many Jews had begun to see in Jesus the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies like this one from Jeremiah.

\* \* \*

The well-known Gospel story is told by St. John with the Eucharist in mind. This is an appropriate selection with which to end the Church's year. All the teachings of Collects, Epistles and Gospels are gathered up in this service. They are pointers to our need, but it is in the Eucharist itself that our hunger and

thirst are satisfied and our needs met. Every time the faithful gather at the Lord's Table there is a new Advent; Christ comes to his own with his precious gifts, and God's age-old promise finds fresh fulfilment.

## St. Andrew's Day

(November 30th)

### THE COLLECT

ALMIGHTY God, who didst give such grace unto thy holy Apostle Saint Andrew, that he readily obeyed the calling of thy Son Jesus Christ, and followed him without delay; Grant unto us all, that we, being called by thy holy Word, may forthwith give up ourselves obediently to fulfil thy holy commandments; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

ROMANS 10. 8

#### *The need for messengers of the Gospel*

"The secret is very near you, in *your own heart*, in *your own mouth*!" It is the secret of faith, which is the burden of our preaching, and it says, in effect, "If you openly admit by *your own mouth* that Jesus Christ is the Lord, and if you believe in *your own heart* that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." For it is believing *in the heart* that makes a man righteous before God, and it is stating his belief by *his own mouth* that confirms his salvation. And the scripture says: "Whosoever believes in him shall not be disappointed." And that "whosoever" means anyone, without distinction between Jew or Greek. For all have the same Lord, whose boundless resources are available to all who turn to him in faith. For:

Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Now how can they call on one in whom they have never

believed? How can they believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how can they hear unless someone proclaims him? And who will go to tell them unless he is sent? As the scripture puts it:

How beautiful are the feet of them that bring glad tidings of good things!

Yet all who have heard have not responded to the gospel. Isaiah asks, you remember:

Lord, who hath believed our report?

(Belief, you see, can only come from hearing the message, and the message is the word of Christ.)

But when I ask myself: "Did they never hear?" I have to answer that they *have* heard, for:

Their sound went out into all the earth,  
And their words unto the ends of the world.

Then I say to myself: "Did Israel not know?" And my answer must be that they did. For Moses says:

I will provoke you to jealousy with that which is no nation,  
With a nation void of understanding will I anger you.

And Isaiah, more daring still, puts these words into the mouth of God:

I was found of them that sought me not.  
I became manifest unto them that asked not of me.

And then, speaking of Israel:

All the day long did I spread out my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people.

THE GOSPEL

ST. MATTHEW 4. 18

*Andrew's instant obedience*

While Jesus was walking by the lake of Galilee he saw two brothers, Simon (Peter) and Andrew, casting their large net into the water. They were fishermen, so Jesus said to them:



"Follow me and I will teach you to catch men!"

At once they left their nets and followed him.

Then he went further on and saw two more men, also brothers, James and John. They were aboard the boat with their father Zebedee repairing their nets, and he called them. At once they left the boat, and their father, and followed him.

---

## Ready Obedience

Andrew was the first of the twelve disciples of Jesus. He had been originally a follower of John the Baptist, but being one day directed by the latter to Jesus in the words "Behold the Lamb of God", Andrew obtained an interview with Jesus and became convinced that he was the Messiah (John 1. 35-42). Today's Gospel tells how Andrew, along with his brother Peter, was finally called to his discipleship.

\* \* \*

Andrew's ready obedience to this call is referred to in the Collect, in which we pray that all Christians may show the same ready obedience to the call of God, which comes to them through Holy Scripture.

Three times in the New Testament Andrew is shown introducing others to Jesus—his own brother, Simon Peter (John 1. 41); the lad with the five loaves and two fishes (John 6. 8); and the group of Greeks who desired to see Jesus (John 12. 22). Because of this he has often been called the first missionary, and St. Andrew's-tide is now widely used as a time of intercession for missionary work.

\* \* \*

The Epistle deals with the need for missionaries. St. Paul is arguing that the Christian Gospel—with its teaching of "righteousness through faith in Christ", available to all men everywhere and not to Jews only—demands a missionary organisation. "How can they believe in one of whom they

have never heard? And how can they hear unless someone proclaims him? And who will go to tell them unless he is sent?"

In the latter part of the Epistle Paul returns to a question which greatly perplexed him—why so many of his fellow-Jews had "not responded to the Gospel". Was it because they hadn't had it preached to them, he asked, or was it because they hadn't understood what it was about? He concluded that they had no reason to be excused on either ground; there was only one other possible reason—like their forbears in the days of the prophets, they were wilfully and inexcusably perverse, "a disobedient and gainsaying people".

The preacher and missionary of today often shares Paul's disappointment, but, like Paul, he still feels compelled to continue. "Necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I preach not the gospel!" Let those whose task it is to speak speak in Christ's name not lack the strong support of Christian prayer.

## St. Thomas the Apostle

(December 21st)

### THE COLLECT

**A**LMIGHTY and everliving God, who for the more confirmation of the faith didst suffer thy holy Apostle Thomas to be doubtful in thy Son's resurrection; Grant us so perfectly, and without all doubt, to believe in thy Son Jesus Christ, that our faith in thy sight may never be reproved. Hear us, O Lord, through the same Jesus Christ, to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and for evermore. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

EPHESIANS 2. 19

### *God's building*

So you are no longer outsiders or aliens, but fellow-citizens with every other Christian—you belong now to the household of

God. Firmly beneath you is the foundation, God's messengers and prophets, the actual foundation-stone being Christ Jesus himself. In him each separate piece of building, properly fitting into its neighbour, grows together into a temple consecrated to the Lord. You are all part of this building in which God himself lives by his Spirit.

THE GOSPEL

ST. JOHN 20. 24

*Jesus speaks of doubt and faith*

But one of the twelve, Thomas (called the Twin), was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples kept on telling him, "We have seen the Lord," but he replied: "Unless I see in his own hands the mark of the nails, and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will never believe!"

Just over a week later, the disciples were indoors again and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood in the middle of them and said, "Peace be with you!"

Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here—look, here are my hands. Take your hand and put it in my side. You must not doubt, but believe."

"My Lord and my God!" cried Thomas.

"Is it because you have seen me that you believe?" Jesus said to him. "Happy are those who have never seen me and yet have believed!"

Jesus gave a great many other signs in the presence of his disciples which are not recorded in this book. But these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is Christ, the Son of God, and that in that faith you may have life as his disciples.

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Doubt and Faith

The disciple whom we have come to know, somewhat unfairly, as "doubting Thomas" (remembered on the shortest day), is



shown earlier in the fourth Gospel to have been both brave and loyal. When the Twelve shrank from returning to Judaea with Jesus because they felt it was like walking into the jaws of death, it was Thomas who cried out, "Come on, let us all go and die with him" (John 11. 16).

\* \* \*

Today's Collect and Gospel show Thomas as the man who just had to have proof—which is why in pictures and statues he is always shown holding a carpenter's rule. "Unless I see in his own hands the mark of the nails, and put my finger where the nails were and put my hand into his side, I will never believe!" Once the proof was given, his deep loyalty found new expression—"My Lord and my God!"

\* \* \*

Perhaps it was a good thing that one disciple was hard to convince, especially an obstinate questioner like Thomas. This thought lies at the back of the first sentence of the Collect, which says God permitted Thomas to doubt ("suffer" = allow, permit), so that there could be further proof ("confirmation") of the Faith. The petition of the Collect is for the gift of a perfect faith, unclouded by any doubts and completely blameless in the sight of God (i.e. a faith which "may never be reproved"). The cry of the father of the epileptic boy expresses it well—"I do believe; help me to believe more" (Mark 9. 24).

\* \* \*

In the Epistle Paul pictures the Church—to which both Thomas and we belong—as a building. Thomas belongs to the foundations, for he was one of the "special messengers and prophets"; and his work, we now see, was to confirm the faith of others who should come after.

# The Conversion of St. Paul

(January 25th)

## THE COLLECT

**O** GOD, who, through the preaching of the blessed Apostle Saint Paul, hast caused the light of the Gospel to shine throughout the world; Grant, we beseech thee, that we, having his wonderful conversion in remembrance, may shew forth our thankfulness unto thee for the same, by following the holy doctrine which he taught; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

## FOR THE EPISTLE

ACTS 9. I

### *Saul meets the living Christ*

Saul, still breathing murderous threats against the disciples of the Lord, went to the High Priest and begged him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he should find there any followers of the Way, whether men or women, he could bring them back to Jerusalem as prisoners.

But on his journey, as he neared Damascus, a light from Heaven suddenly blazed around him, and he fell to the ground. Then he heard a voice speaking to him:

“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”

“Who are you, Lord?” he asked.

“I am Jesus whom you are persecuting,” was the reply. “But now stand up and go into the city and there you will be told what you must do.”

His companions on the journey stood there speechless, for they had heard the voice but could see no one. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they took him by the hand and led him into Damascus. There he remained sightless for three days, and during that time he had nothing either to eat or drink.

Now in Damascus there was a disciple by the name of

Ananias. The Lord spoke to this man in a dream, calling him by his name.

"I am here, Lord," he replied.

Then the Lord said to him:

"Get up and go down to the street called Straight and inquire at the house of Judas for a man named Saul from Tarsus. At this moment he is praying and he sees in his mind's eye a man by the name of Ananias coming into the house, and placing his hands upon him to restore his sight."

But Ananias replied:

"Lord, I have heard on all hands about this man and how much harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem! Why even now he holds powers from the chief priests to arrest all who call upon your name."

But the Lord said to him:

"Go on your way, for this man is my chosen instrument to bear my name before the gentiles and their kings, as well as to the sons of Israel. Indeed, I myself will show him what he must suffer for the sake of my name."

Then Ananias set out and went to the house, and there he laid his hands upon Saul, and said:

"Saul, brother, the Lord has sent me—Jesus who appeared to you on your journey here—so that you may recover your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

Immediately something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got to his feet and was baptised. Then he took some food and regained his strength.

Saul stayed with the disciples in Damascus for some time. Without delay he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues declaring that he is the Son of God. All his hearers were staggered and kept saying:

"Isn't this the man who so bitterly persecuted those who called on the name in Jerusalem, and came down here with the sole object of taking back all such people as prisoners before the chief priests?"

But Saul went on from strength to strength, reducing to



confusion the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving beyond doubt that this man is Christ.

THE GOSPEL

ST. MATTHEW 19. 27

*Sacrifices for the kingdom will be rewarded*

At this Peter exclaimed: "Look, we have left everything and followed you. What is that going to be worth to us?"

"Believe me," said Jesus, "when I tell you that in the next world, when the Son of Man shall sit down on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones and become judges of the twelve tribes of Israel. Every man who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or land for my sake will receive it all back many times over, and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first now will be last then—and the last first!"

---

### Conversion

Almost all the saints are remembered on the traditional date of their death or martyrdom; the exceptions are the Virgin Mary, John the Baptist and Paul.

It is not surprising that Paul's day (January 25th) is the day of his conversion, when he "turned right round" (for that is what "conversion" means), changing the whole direction of his life; no longer fighting against Christ but under his banner. Saul the persecutor became Paul the apostle. He saw the vision and made the greatest surrender that any man can make—the surrender of himself. Before, he had done what *he* thought best; now, it was to be Christ's way: "Go into the city and there you will be told what you must do."

\* \* \*

The Collect at once links this great event in Paul's life with our life today. Because Paul was "the chosen instrument to

bear Christ's name before the gentiles and their kings", we in our land today have the "light of the Gospel", and the true "thank you" to God for Paul's life and work for Christ is that we in our turn should try to be as keen, well-informed and faithful in winning the world for Christ today. Nothing less than this is meant by "following the holy doctrine which he taught".

Sudden conversion, such as was Paul's, is by no means a universal experience. There are many gateways into the city of God, and the Holy Spirit may take men along widely different roads to get there, but the end is the same for all—to become more and more completely committed Christians whom God can use in working out his own glorious purposes.

\* \* \*

The chosen Gospel passage fits somewhat oddly into the picture, since the first part of it refers to a promise made by Jesus to the Twelve (of whom Paul, of course, was not one). There is more relevance in the last two sentences. With what is said there one can imagine Paul to have been well content!

## THE PRESENTATION OF CHRIST IN THE TEMPLE commonly called

### The Purification of St. Mary the Virgin (February 2nd)

#### THE COLLECT

**A**LMIGHTY and everliving God, we humbly beseech thy Majesty, that as thy only-begotten Son was this day presented in the temple in substance of our flesh, so we may be presented unto thee with pure and clean hearts, by the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

*The coming messenger*

"See, I send my messenger to clear the way before me, and the Lord whom you long for will come suddenly to his Temple! That messenger of the Covenant, whom you so desire, is coming, says the Lord of Hosts. But who can face the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he is like the refining fire of the furnace, like the harsh soap of the bleacher, and he will sit down to refine and purify. He will purify the sons of Levi, and refine them like gold and silver until they are men who make true offerings to the Lord.

Then shall the sacrifices of Judah and Jerusalem be acceptable to the Lord, as they were in days of old, and as they were in days gone by.

Then I will draw near to you for judgement. I shall be a ready witness against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers; against those who oppress the widow and the orphan, who cheat the hired man of his wages; against those who ill-treat the foreigner because they have no fear of me.

These are the words of the Lord of Hosts."

## THE GOSPEL

## ST. LUKE 2. 22

*The infant Jesus is brought to the temple*

When the "purification" time, stipulated by the Law of Moses, was completed, they brought Jesus to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. This was to fulfil a requirement of the Law—

Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord.

They also offered the sacrifice prescribed by the Law—

A pair of turtle doves, or two young pigeons.

In Jerusalem was a man by the name of Simeon. He was an



upright man, devoted to the service of God, living in expectation of the "salvation of Israel". His heart was open to the Holy Spirit, and it had been revealed to him that he would not die before he saw the Lord's Christ. He had been led by the Spirit to go into the Temple, and when Jesus' parents brought the child in to have done to him what the Law required, he took him up in his arms, blessed God and said—

"At last, Lord, you can dismiss your servant in peace, as you promised! For with my own eyes I have seen your salvation which you have made ready for every people—a light to show truth to the gentiles and bring glory to your people Israel."

The child's father and mother were still amazed at what was said about him, when Simeon gave them his blessing. He said to Mary, the child's mother:

"This child is destined to make many fall and many rise in Israel and to set up a standard which many will attack—for he will expose the secret thoughts of many hearts. And for you . . . your very soul will be pierced by a sword.

There was also present, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher, who was a prophetess. She was a very old woman, having had seven years' married life and was now a widow of eighty-four. She spent her whole life in the Temple and worshipped God night and day with fastings and prayers. She came up at this very moment, praised God and spoke about Jesus to all those in Jerusalem who were expecting redemption.

When they had completed all the requirements of the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew up and became strong and full of wisdom. And God's blessing was upon him.

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### Dedication to God

This day, commonly called "The Purification", is really more a feast of our Lord than of the Virgin Mary his mother. In the middle ages it was called "Candlemas", and the candles carried

in procession reminded worshippers that they belonged to Christ, the light of the world, who had come to "show truth to the gentiles and bring glory to God's people, Israel".

\* \* \*

The Law of Moses (to be found in the first five books of the Old Testament), laid it down that every first-born male child belonged to God (he was "holy to the Lord"), and his parents could only obtain his release from temple or other direct service by paying the priest a sum of money. In the case of the mother there was a purification time of forty days (note that December 25th to February 2nd is forty days); she offered her sacrifice—in this case a pair of pigeons—and then with the blessing of the priest returned once more to ordinary life. It was for these two reasons that the Holy Family had come this day to the temple.

\* \* \*

The words of the Epistle (from the Book Malachi, dated about 450 B.C.) were the prophet's reply to those of his contemporaries who had been saying, "The times are out of joint and God seems incapable of putting them right." "Don't you believe it," replies the prophet, "God will act, through his messenger, against the corrupt priesthood (the sons of Levi) and will denounce evildoers among the people. Only after such a clean up can a new beginning be made in the service of God; only so can the 'sacrifices of Judah and Jerusalem be acceptable to the Lord as they were in days of old'".

This was the prophecy's immediate application, but Malachi spoke better than he knew, for in the New Testament the words are shown to have been fulfilled in the coming of John the Baptist—the messenger who cleared the way, and in Jesus himself—the Lord who came to his temple.

\* \* \*

In the Collect we ask that "we may be presented to God with pure and clean hearts." What did the compilers of the Prayer Book mean by this? Acceptance in the day of judgment? Possibly, but seeing that we recall the Infant Jesus being

presented as one dedicated to God, it is much more likely that they were thinking of the *immediate* dedication of our lives to the service of the heavenly Father. This meaning is re-enforced by the beautiful ceremonies of Candlemas already mentioned in these notes.

## St. Matthias's Day

(February 24th)

### THE COLLECT

O ALMIGHTY God, who into the place of the traitor Judas didst choose thy faithful servant Matthias to be of the number of the twelve Apostles; Grant that thy Church, being alway preserved from false Apostles, may be ordered and guided by faithful and true pastors; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

### FOR THE EPISTLE

ACTS I. 15

### *Judas' place is filled*

It was during this period that Peter stood up among the brothers—there were about a hundred and twenty present at the time—and said:

“My brothers, the prophecy of scripture given through the Holy Spirit by the lips of David concerning Judas was bound to come true. He was the man who acted as guide to those who arrested Jesus, though he was one of our number and he had a share in this ministry of ours.”

(This man had bought a piece of land with the proceeds of his infamy, but his body swelled up and his intestines burst. This fact became well known to all the residents of Jerusalem so that the piece of land came to be called in their language Akeldama, which means “the field of blood”.)



"Now it is written in the book of psalms of such a man:

Let his habitation be made desolate,  
And let no man dwell therein:

and:

His office let another take.

"It becomes necessary then that whoever joins us must be someone who has been in our company during the whole time that the Lord Jesus lived his life with us, from the beginning when John baptised him until the day when he was taken up from us. This man must be an eye-witness with us to the resurrection of Jesus."

Two men were put forward, Joseph called Barsabas who was also called Justus, and Matthias. Then they prayed:

"Thou Lord who knowest the hearts of all men, show us which of these two thou hast chosen to accept that ministry of an apostle which Judas forfeited to go where he belonged."

Then they drew lots for these men, and the lot fell to Matthias, and thereafter he was considered equally an apostle with the eleven.

THE GOSPEL

ST. MATTHEW II. 25

*Truth is revealed to the childlike*

At this same time Jesus said, "O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, I thank you for hiding these things from the clever and intelligent and for showing them to mere children. Yes, I thank you, Father, that this was your will."

Then he said: "Everything has been put in my hands by my Father, and nobody knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son—and the man to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

"Come to me, all of you who are weary and over-burdened, and I will give you rest! Put on my yoke and learn from me.

For I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

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### Faithful and True Pastors

Matthias is remembered on February 24th. There is no further reference to him in the New Testament beyond that in the Epistle. Even the traditions about him are vague and uncertain.

The selection of Matthias happened during the period of waiting before Pentecost. Some have thought it an over-hasty action on the part of the Church, believing that, as events showed, Paul was really the Divine choice for the vacancy. But the view of the Collect is quite plain—that Matthias *was* God's choice.

\* \* \*

The paragraph in brackets in the Epistle was probably not part of Peter's speech and may have been added for the benefit of Luke's friend Theophilus (to whom he addressed the Acts). According to the first Gospel Judas committed suicide by hanging himself. St. Augustine reconciled the two accounts by saying that Judas tried to hang himself, but the rope broke and he was dashed to pieces on the stones below. More probably two different traditions about how Judas met his death were current in the early Church.

\* \* \*

The Gospel passage invites the question—why were these words chosen for this particular day? No doubt, if Matthias had been a disciple "during the whole time that the Lord Jesus lived his life from the beginning when John baptised him until the day when he was taken up", they were words he must have heard, and heard perhaps more than once. But there is possibly another reason. The words of the Gospel express what every "faithful and true pastor"—indeed what every "faithful and true Christian"—knows and believes about his religion; that

the great things of God are revealed to those of child-like mind; that the only way to the Father is "through Jesus Christ our Lord"; and that all, without distinction, are invited to seek Christ's guidance and grace.

This last "comfortable word" has been treasured and verified in experience by countless generations of Christians:

Finding, following, keeping, struggling,

Is he sure to bless?

"Angels, martyrs, prophets, virgins,

Answer, Yes."

## The Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

(March 25th)

### THE COLLECT

WE beseech thee, O Lord, pour thy grace into our hearts; that, as we have known the incarnation of thy Son Jesus Christ by the message of an angel, so by his cross and passion we may be brought unto the glory of his resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

### FOR THE EPISTLE

ISAIAH 7. 10

#### *The prophecy of the child Immanuel*

The Lord spoke again to Ahaz: "Ask for a Sign from the Lord your God! Let it be shown in the depths of the underworld or in the heights of Heaven."

But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to any test."

Then I said, "Listen, you house of David! Are you not satisfied with trying the patience of men? Must you try the patience of my God also? Because you will not ask, the Lord himself will



give you a Sign. See, a maiden shall conceive and give birth to a son, and shall call him Immanuel, which means, God is with us. He will eat milk and honey before he is old enough to know good food from bad."

THE GOSPEL

ST. LUKE I. 26

*The vision comes to Mary*

Then, six months after Zacharias' vision, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a Galilean town, Nazareth by name, to a young woman who was engaged to a man called Joseph (a descendant of David). The girl's name was Mary. The angel entered her room and said:

"Greetings to you, Mary. O favoured one!—the Lord be with you!"

Mary was deeply perturbed at these words and wondered what such a greeting could possibly mean. But the angel said to her:

"Do not be afraid, Mary; God loves you dearly. You are going to be the mother of a son, and you will call him Jesus. He will be great and will be known as the Son of the most high. The Lord God will give him the throne of his forefather, David, and he will be king over the people of Jacob for ever. His reign shall never end."

Then Mary spoke to the angel:

"How can this be," she said, "I am not married!"

But the angel made this reply to her—

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, the power of the most high will overshadow you. Your child will therefore be called holy—the Son of God. Your cousin Elisabeth has also conceived a son, old as she is. Indeed, this is the sixth month for her, a woman who was called barren. For no promise of God can fail to be fulfilled."

"I belong to the Lord, body and soul," replied Mary, "let it happen as you say." And at this the angel left her.

## The Incarnation

The word "annunciation" (which means "an announcement") refers to the message the angel brought to the Virgin Mary, as described in the Gospel, and is almost entirely used to indicate this one event. Like the "Purification", this is more a feast of our Lord than of the Blessed Virgin, which is no doubt why Bishop Cosin in the final revision of the Prayer Book wanted the day re-named "The Annunciation of our Lord to the Blessed Virgin Mary".

The popular name "Lady Day" derives from "The Lady"—chosen by God for the supreme honour of becoming the mother of his only-begotten Son. As the feast celebrates the beginning of the Incarnation (this word means "taking human flesh") its date, March 25th, is just nine months before Christmas. Until 1752, it and not January 1st began the civil year.

\* \* \*

The Epistle from the Old Testament needs some explanation. Isaiah went at God's bidding to seek an interview with King Ahaz of Judah, to give him advice and encouragement at a time when his country was being threatened by invasion. As what we have here is a conversation between Isaiah and Ahaz, it is a help to read "Isaiah speaking in God's name said to Ahaz" instead of "The Lord spoke to Ahaz", which was the prophet's self-effacing way of putting it since he saw himself simply as the mouthpiece of God.

When King Ahaz refused to ask God for a Sign to confirm the prophet's message, Isaiah told him he would get one anyway; a young woman would bear a child to be called Immanuel (a name meaning "God is with us"), and before he was old enough to tell good food from bad he would be eating milk and honey—sure signs that peace and prosperity had returned to the land; the danger would be past and the king's enemies would have been overthrown.

It was natural for the first Christians, being Jews, to search their scriptures for prophecies of the Messiah and to see them

fulfilled in Jesus, especially in their argument with non-believing Jews. So this prophecy was claimed as foretelling the Virgin Birth. (In fact the original Hebrew word used in Isaiah 7. 14 does not *necessarily* mean a "virgin"; it was used about young women generally—whether single or married; but the Greek Bible from which St. Matthew quotes (1. 23) translated it by a word meaning "virgin".)

Whatever we may think of this or of the Virgin Birth itself, the broad truth is plain enough. Just as the sign to King Ahaz that his enemies would be overthrown lay in the child's name Immanuel ("God is with us") rather than in the circumstances of his birth; so in the same way, Christ, the new Immanuel (and not in name only but in actual fact) is the sign from God that the invading powers of evil are about to be defeated.

\* \* \*

The Collect reminds us that if the Incarnation of which we have learned and in which we believe is to be worth while, we must also accept the Cross, not only as the means of our salvation but also as the pattern of our everyday life. No cross, no crown!

## St. Mark's Day

(April 25th)

### THE COLLECT

**O** ALMIGHTY God, who hast instructed thy holy Church with the heavenly doctrine of thy Evangelist St. Mark; Give us grace, that, being not like children carried away with every blast of vain doctrine, we may be established in the truth of thy holy Gospel; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

EPHESIANS 4. 7

*Growing up into Christ*

Naturally there are different gifts and functions; individually



grace is given to us in different ways out of the rich diversity of Christ's giving. As the scripture says:

When he ascended on high, he led captivity captive,  
And gave gifts unto men.

(Note the implication here—to say that Christ “ascended” means that he must previously have “descended”, that is from the height of Heaven to the depth of this world. The one who made this descent is identically the same person as he who has now ascended high above the very Heavens—that the whole universe from lowest to highest might know his presence.)

His “gifts unto men” were varied. Some he made his messengers, some prophets, some preachers of the gospel; to some he gave the power to guide and teach his people. His gifts were made that Christians might be properly equipped for their service, that the whole body might be built up until the time comes when, in the unity of common faith and common knowledge of the Son of God, we arrive at real maturity—that measure of development which is meant by “the fulness of Christ”.

We are not meant to remain as children at the mercy of every chance wind of teaching and the jockeying of men who are expert in the crafty presentation of lies. But we are meant to hold firmly to the truth in love, and to grow up in every way into Christ, the head. For it is from the head that the whole body, as a harmonious structure knit together by the joints with which it is provided, grows by the proper functioning of individual parts to its full maturity in love.

THE GOSPEL

ST. JOHN 15. 1

*Growing in union with Christ*

“I am the real vine, my Father is the vine-dresser. He removes any of my branches which are not bearing fruit and he prunes every branch that does bear fruit to increase its yield. Now, you have already been pruned by my words. You must go on grow-

ing in me and I will grow in you. For just as the branch cannot bear any fruit unless it shares the life of the vine, so you can produce nothing unless you go on growing in me. I am the vine itself, you are the branches. It is the man who shares my life and whose life I share who proves fruitful. For the plain fact is that apart from me you can do nothing at all. The man who does not share my life is like a branch that is broken off and withers away. He becomes just like the dry sticks that men pick up and use for firewood. But if you live your life in me, and my words live in your hearts, you can ask for whatever you like and it will come true for you. This is how my Father will be glorified—in your becoming fruitful and being my disciples.

“I have loved you just as the Father has loved me. You must go on living in my love. If you keep my commandments you will live in my love just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and live in his love. I have told you this so that you can share my joy, and that your happiness may be complete.”

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### Learning and Living Out the Gospel

The Collect reminds us of Mark’s supreme achievement—the writing of the earliest Gospel. He calls it “the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1. 1) and it has furnished the Church throughout the ages with “heavenly doctrine”, i.e. divine teaching.

From “give us grace” onwards, the Collect is based upon the Epistle. The latter’s words, “We are not meant to remain as children at the mercy of every chance wind of teaching” explain for us “children carried away with every blast of vain doctrine.” And what does being “established in the truth of thy holy Gospel” mean but that “we are meant to hold firmly to the truth in love, and to grow up in every way into Christ, the head”?

\* \* \*

This idea of growing up into Christ—living the Gospel we have learned about—is the theme of the passage from St. John 15. There the secret, which Mark well knew, is disclosed. The real mystics understand it well.

As the moon and its beams are one  
So that I be one with thee,  
This is my prayer to thee, my Lord,  
This is the beggar's plea.

As words and their meaning are linked,  
Serving one purpose each,  
Be thou and I so knit, O Lord,  
And through me breathe thy speech.

Take thou this body, O my Christ,  
Dwell as its soul within;  
To be an instant separate  
I count a deadly sin. (D. N. Tilak.)

For others of us it may mean simply keeping in touch with Christ through prayer and sacrament, "that we may evermore dwell in him and he in us." "Just as the branch cannot bear any fruit unless it shares the life of the vine, so you can produce nothing unless you go on growing in me."

How is it with you?

## St. Philip and St. James's Day

(May 1st)

### THE COLLECT

O ALMIGHTY God, whom truly to know is everlasting life; Grant us perfectly to know thy Son Jesus Christ to be the way, the truth, and the life; that, following the steps of thy holy Apostles, St. Philip and St. James, we may steadfastly walk in the way that leadeth to eternal life; through the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*



*The Christian can even welcome trouble*

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, sends greeting to the twelve dispersed tribes.

When all kinds of trials and temptations crowd into your lives, my brothers, don't resent them as intruders, but welcome them as friends! Realise that they come to test your faith and to produce in you the quality of endurance. But let the process go on until that endurance is fully developed, and you will find you have become men of mature character with the right sort of independence. And if, in the process, any of you does not know how to meet any particular problem he has only to ask God—who gives generously to all men without making them feel foolish or guilty—and he may be quite sure that the necessary wisdom will be given him. But he must ask in sincere faith without secret doubts as to whether he really wants God's help or not. The man who trusts God, but with inward reservations, is like a wave of the sea, carried forward by the wind one moment and driven back the next. That sort of man cannot hope to receive anything from the Lord, and the life of a man of divided loyalty will reveal instability at every turn.

The brother who is poor may be glad because God has called him to the true riches. The rich may be glad that God has shown him his spiritual poverty. For the rich man, as such, will wither away as surely as summer flowers. One day the sunrise brings a scorching wind; the grass withers at once and so do all the flowers—all that lovely sight is destroyed. Just as surely will the rich man and all his extravagant ways fall into the blight of decay.

The man who patiently endures the temptations and trials that come to him is the truly happy man. For once his testing is complete he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to all who love him.

*Jesus the way, the truth and the life*

Jesus said to his disciples: "You must not let yourselves be distressed—you must hold on to your faith in God and to your faith in me. There are many rooms in my Father's House. If there were not, should I have told you that I am going away to prepare a place for you? It is true that I am going away to prepare a place for you, but it is just as true that I am coming again to welcome you into my own home, so that you may be where I am. You know where I am going and you know the road I am going to take."

"Lord," Thomas remonstrated, "we do not know where you're going, and how can we know what road you're going to take?"

"I myself am the road," replied Jesus, "and the truth and the life. No one approaches the Father except through me. If you had known who I am, you would have known my Father. From now on, you do know him and you have seen him."

Then Philip said to him: "Show us the Father, Lord, and we shall be satisfied."

"Have I been such a long time with you," returned Jesus, "without your really knowing me, Philip? The man who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The very words I say to you are not my own. It is the Father who lives in me who carries out his work through me. Do you believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? But if you cannot, then believe me because of what you see me do. I assure you that the man who believes in me will do the same things that I have done, yes, and he will do even greater things than these, for I am going away to the Father. Whatever you ask the Father in my name, I will do—that the Son may bring glory to the Father. And if you ask me anything in my name, I will grant it."

## The Road to God

Two questions arise. Who are the two remembered? Why are they remembered together?

This Philip and James are two of the Twelve, James being the son of Alphaeus, *not* the brother of John, who is remembered on July 25th, and *not* James, the Lord's brother.

The two appear to have come together in the Calendar by accident; on May 1st in the sixth century a church was consecrated in Rome which claimed to possess relics of these two saints, and they have been remembered together ever since!

The Epistle points out that trials and temptations await all who keep firmly on the road to God. It was chosen from "James" in the belief that the James remembered on May 1st wrote it, but today this New Testament book is generally supposed to have come from the pen of James, the Lord's brother.

\* \* \*

The Gospel selection introduces Philip and also has much to say on the theme of the day. Jesus has not only travelled the road in advance of us—as far as we are concerned he is himself the road, and from what we see and know of him we can see and know what the Father is like.

\* \* \*

The Collect reminds us of the one thing needful for a true "pilgrim's progress"; it is getting to know Christ, not at second hand but at first hand—knowing him as we know our closest friends, dwelling in him as he dwells in us. This means we must give him time; and study, prayer and sacrament all have their place.



# St. Barnabas the Apostle

(June 11th)

## THE COLLECT

**O** LORD God Almighty, who didst endue thy holy Apostle Barnabas with singular gifts of the Holy Ghost; Leave us not, we beseech thee, destitute of thy manifold gifts, nor yet of grace to use them alway to thy honour and glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

## FOR THE EPISTLE

ACTS II. 22

### *Barnabas strengthens the young Church*

News of these things came to the ears of the Church in Jerusalem and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw this working of God's grace, he was delighted. He urged them all to be resolute in their faithfulness to the Lord, for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. So it happened that a considerable number of people became followers of the Lord.

Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to find Saul. When he found him he brought him up to Antioch. Then for a whole year they met together with the Church and taught a large crowd. It was in Antioch that the disciples were first given the name of "Christians".

During this period some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them by the name of Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there was to be a great famine throughout the world. (This actually happened in the days of Claudius.) The disciples determined to send relief to the brothers in Judaea, each contributing as he was able. This they did, sending their contribution to the elders there personally through Barnabas and Saul.

*The greatest love*

"This is my commandment: that you love each other as I have loved you. There is no greater love than this—that a man should lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I tell you to do. I shall not call you servants any longer, for a servant does not share his master's confidence. No, I call you friends, now, because I have told you everything that I have heard from the Father.

"It is not that you have chosen me; but it is I who have chosen you. I have appointed you to go and bear fruit that will be lasting; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give it to you."

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### God's Gifts and Their Use

In the Collect, "endue" means to endow, or give; "singular" means outstanding, or exceptional; "destitute of thy manifold gifts" means without any of the many gifts of the Holy Spirit. Note that Barnabas is called an Apostle—though he was not one of the Twelve with whom this name is generally associated (see Acts 14. 14).

\* \* \*

What were the "singular gifts of the Holy Spirit" which the Cypriot Barnabas possessed?

First, he was a leader among his fellow-Christians. This comes out in the Epistle. No doubt the Apostles in Jerusalem were somewhat disconcerted when they received "news" that Greeks as well as Jews were joining the Church in large numbers, so Barnabas was sent on a fact-finding mission. St. Luke goes on to record how his qualities of leadership were displayed. Barnabas was one of the first to see clearly the course the young Church should follow.

Second, he was a preacher and teacher. The Acts makes it

plain that though Barnabas was outstripped by his partner Paul, he still played a prominent part in the missionary work of the Church.

Thirdly, Barnabas was able to accomplish so much because he was so large-hearted a Christian. He was generous—putting all he had into the Church's work; he was ready to believe the best of others—as when he persuaded the suspicious apostles to accept Saul, and when he gave the backsliding Mark another chance; and he was big enough to take second place to Paul when their joint missionary journeys began. St. Luke reveals the secret of his life when he writes of Barnabas, "He was full of the Holy Spirit and of faith."

The Gospel is a particularly happy choice; it expresses well those particular points of Christian discipleship which specially appealed to Barnabas.

\* \* \*

In remembering the apostle on June 11th each year, the Church recalls how he used his singular gifts for Christ and for the sake of the growing Christian community. It all happened a long time ago. Yet is it so very different today? So long as we believe—as we must—that we live in a *God-centred*, not a man-centred world, our gifts are seen to be his gifts to us, and our use of them must be for his "honour and glory".

## St. John Baptist's Day

(June 24th)

### THE COLLECT

**A**Lmighty God, by whose providence thy servant John Baptist was wonderfully born, and sent to prepare the way of thy Son our Saviour, by preaching of repentance; Make us so to follow his doctrine and holy life, that we may truly repent according to his preaching; and after his example constantly speak the truth, boldly rebuke vice, and patiently



suffer for the truth's sake; through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
*Amen.*

FOR THE EPISTLE

ISAIAH 40. I

*The herald of good news*

Have pity, have pity on my people, says your God.  
Speak gently to Jerusalem, and tell her plainly  
That her war is over, her sin is pardoned—  
That she has fully paid for all her sins  
And the receipt is in the hand of the Lord!  
A voice cries: Clear a way for the Lord through the waste-land,  
Make straight through the desert a high-road for our God.  
Every valley must be filled in;  
Every mountain and hill must be brought low.  
Rough ground must be levelled  
And ridges smoothed into a plain.  
Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,  
And all men shall see it together.  
This is what the Lord commands.

A voice says: Cry aloud!  
And I said, What shall I cry?  
All men are like grass,  
And all their beauty like the flower in the field.  
Grass withers and flowers fade  
When the breath of the Lord blows upon them.  
Indeed men and women are like grass—  
Grass withers and flowers fade,  
But the Word of our God stands for ever.

And now go up into a high mountain,  
You herald of good news for Zion!  
Lift up your voice with all your strength,  
You herald of good news of Jerusalem!  
Shout aloud and have no fear:

Say to the cities of Judah,  
Look now upon your God!  
See, the Lord God comes with power,  
And rules by his own strength.  
See, he brings his prizes with him,  
And his rewards are in his hands!  
He will feed his flock like a shepherd,  
He will gather the lambs into his arms  
And carry them on his breast;  
He will gently lead those that are with young.

THE GOSPEL

ST. LUKE I. 57

*John, the messenger is born*

Then came the time for Elisabeth's child to be born, and she gave birth to a son. Her neighbours and relations heard of the great mercy the Lord had shown her and shared her joy.

When the eighth day came, they were going to circumcise the child and call him Zacharias, after his father, but his mother said:

"Oh, no! He must be called John."

"But none of your relations is called John," they replied. And they made signs to his father to see what name he wanted the child to have. He beckoned for a writing-tablet and wrote the words, "His name is John", which greatly surprised everybody. Then his power of speech suddenly came back, and his first words were to thank God. The neighbours were awestruck at this, and all these incidents were reported in the hill-country of Judaea. People turned the whole matter over in their hearts, and said:

"What is this child's future going to be?" For the Lord's blessing was plainly upon him.

Then Zacharias, his father, filled with the Holy Spirit and speaking like a prophet, said:

"Blessings on the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has turned his face towards his people and has set them free! And he

has raised up for us a standard of salvation in his servant David's house! Long, long ago, through the words of his holy prophets, he promised to do this for us, so that we should be safe from our enemies and secure from all who hate us. So does he continue the mercy he showed to our forefathers. So does he remember the holy agreement he made with them and the oath which he swore to our father Abraham, to make us this gift: that we should be saved from the hands of our enemies, and in his presence should serve him unafraid in holiness and righteousness all our lives.

"And you, little child, will be called the prophet of the most high, for you will go before the Lord to prepare the way for his coming. It will be for you to give his people knowledge of their salvation through the forgiveness of their sins. Because the heart of our God is full of mercy towards us, the first light of Heaven shall come to visit us—to shine on those who lie in darkness and under the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the path of peace."

The little child grew up and became strong in spirit. He lived in lonely places until the day came for him to show himself to Israel.

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### The Way of the Lord

On June 24th it is John the Baptist's birth rather than his death which is remembered. He was six months older than Jesus, and so the date in the Calendar is fixed by reference to Christmas Day.

The Gospel tells the story of John's birth and also what his father, Zacharias saw his future to be. "You, little child, will be called the prophet of the most high, for you will go before the Lord to prepare the way for his coming."

\* \* \*

The passage from Isaiah 40 is used for the Epistle because it contains the prophecy associated with John the Baptist in all



the four Gospels. This part of Isaiah is the work of the unknown prophet of the Exile ("the second Isaiah"), and he is here foretelling the speedy and triumphant return of God and his people to Jerusalem. A mysterious voice commands that God's road through the desert shall be made ready. Those in Judaea are told to climb to high ground so that they can see the glorious homecoming. By the time of our Lord it was widely believed that the Messiah would be prepared for in just this way. John claimed to be the voice heralding the Messiah's coming (see John 1. 23).

\* \* \*

This is referred to also, at the beginning of the Collect, as part of God's plan (his "providence"). John prepared the way by calling for repentance. "Change your hearts," he said, "and then go and do something to show that your hearts are really changed."

Three ways in which John gave proof of his own "repentance" are mentioned in the last part of the Collect; he told the truth as he saw it, he spoke out against what he believed to be wrong and he was ready to suffer pain rather than give way on points of principle. We might very well do the same; Christians who are not ashamed to nail their colours to the mast, like John, "prepare the way of the Lord".

## St. Peter's Day

(June 29th)

### THE COLLECT

**O** ALMIGHTY God, who by thy Son Jesus Christ didst give to thy Apostle St. Peter many excellent gifts, and commandedst him earnestly to feed thy flock; Make, we beseech thee, all Bishops and Pastors diligently to preach thy holy Word,

and the people obediently to follow the same, that they may receive the crown of everlasting glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

THE EPISTLE

ACTS 12. I

*Peter's miraculous rescue*

It was at this time that King Herod laid violent hands on some of the Church members. James, John's brother, he executed with the sword, and when he found this action pleased the Jews he went on to arrest Peter as well. It was during the days of unleavened bread that he actually made the arrest. He put Peter in prison with no less than four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending to bring him out to the people after the Passover. So Peter was closely guarded in the prison, while the Church prayed to God earnestly on his behalf.

On the very night that Herod was planning to bring him out, Peter was asleep between two soldiers, chained with double chains, while guards maintained a strict watch in the doorway of the prison. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared, and light shone in the cell. He tapped Peter on the side and woke him up, saying, "Get up quickly." His chains fell away from his hands and the angel said to him, "Fasten your belt and put on your sandals." And he did so. Then the angel continued, "Wrap your cloak round you and follow me." So Peter followed him out, not knowing whether what the angel was doing were real—indeed he felt he must be taking part in a vision. So they passed right through the first and second guard-points and came to the iron gate that led out into the city. This opened for them of its own accord, and they went out and had passed along one street when the angel suddenly vanished from Peter's sight. Then Peter came to himself and said aloud, "Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent his angel to rescue me from the power of Herod and from all that the Jewish people are expecting."

*Peter's sudden discovery*

When Jesus reached the Caesarea-Philippi district he asked his disciples a question. "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

"Well, some say John the Baptist," they told him. "Some say Elijah, others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

"But what about you?" he said to them. "Who do you say that I am?"

Simon Peter answered, "You? You are Christ, the Son of the living God!"

"Simon, son of Jonah, you are a fortunate man indeed!" said Jesus, "for it was not your own nature but my Heavenly Father who has revealed this truth to you! Now I tell you that you are Peter the rock, and it is on this rock that I am going to found my Church, and the power of death will never prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of Heaven; whatever you forbid on earth will be what is forbidden in Heaven and whatever you permit on earth will be what is permitted in Heaven!"

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### Pastors and People

Peter is the best known of the twelve disciples and was their acknowledged leader. His real name was Simon. Jesus gave him the name Peter, which is a Greek word meaning "rock". The Aramaic form "Cephas" means the same thing.

This is taken up in the Gospel. The passage has been interpreted in a number of ways but it seems simplest to suppose that the foundation rock upon which Jesus said he would build his Church was Peter himself. This prophecy came true; in spite of his repeated failures, he remained the chosen instrument of God's will. He was given the responsibility of feeding Christ's flock (John 21), and became the chief pastor, (i.e. shepherd), of the early Church in its first critical days.

\* \* \*



It should be noted that there is nothing in this passage or anywhere else in the New Testament about a successor of Peter in the leadership of the Church. The words in the Gospel were spoken to Peter personally and not to Peter as bishop of Rome (an office which tradition says he afterwards held). A foundation of rock in the nature of the case is a "once only"; there can never be another.

\* \* \*

The work of Peter as chief pastor is fully reported in the first part of the Acts. The Epistle tells of his miraculous deliverance from prison. Note that the Greek word for "angel" means messenger; he can be human or spiritual. Here it is possible that the "angel" was none other than the prison governor himself. But the hand of God was in it, just the same.

\* \* \*

The Collect refers to Peter's "many excellent gifts". Among these we should want to put his strong faith in Christ, his loyalty and fearless leadership after Pentecost, his powers as a preacher and his readiness, under the Spirit's guidance, to open the doors of the Church to the gentiles.

The Collect also reminds us that the Church's great need in the twentieth century remains what it was in the first and the sixteenth—a true preaching and living out of the Gospel. Clergy and lay people all have their part to play, and it is the Christian community and preacher together that reach the world.

## St. Mary Magdalen

(July 22nd)

### THE COLLECT

**O** ALMIGHTY God, whose blessed Son did call and sanctify Mary Magdalen to be a witness to his resurrection: Mercifully grant that by thy grace we may be healed of

all our infirmities, and alway serve thee in the power of his endless life, who with thee and the Holy Ghost liveth and reigneth, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

THE EPISTLE

II CORINTHIANS 5. 14

*New men in Christ*

The very spring of our actions is the love of Christ. We look at it like this: if one died for all men then, in a sense, they all died, and his purpose in dying for them is that their lives should now be no longer lived for themselves but for him who died and rose again for them. This means that our knowledge of men can no longer be based on their outward lives (indeed, even though we knew Christ as a man we do not know him like that any longer). For if a man is in Christ he becomes a new person altogether—the past is finished and gone, everything has become fresh and new.

THE GOSPEL

ST. JOHN 20. 11

*Mary sees the risen Christ*

But Mary stood just outside the tomb, and she was crying. And as she cried, she looked into the tomb and saw two angels in white who sat, one at the head and the other at the foot of the place where the body of Jesus had lain.

The angels spoke to her, "Why are you crying?" they asked.

"Because they have taken away my Lord, and I don't know where they have put him!" she said.

Then she turned and noticed Jesus standing there, without realising that it was Jesus.

"Why are you crying?" said Jesus to her. "Who are you looking for?"

She, supposing that he was the gardener, said, "Oh, sir, if you have carried him away, please tell me where you have put him and I will take him away."

Jesus said to her, "Mary!"

At this she turned right round and said to him, in Hebrew, "Master!"

"No!" said Jesus, "do not hold me now. I have not yet gone up to the Father. Go and tell my brothers that I am going up to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."

And Mary of Magdala went off to the disciples, with the news, "I have seen the Lord!" and she told them what he had said to her.

---

### Saved to Serve

The Prayer Book of 1928 has restored St. Mary Magdalen to the Calendar, and has provided a new Collect, Epistle and Gospel, rightly abandoning those appointed for this day in the Prayer Book of 1549.

This Mary, known as "the woman from Magdala", had once been possessed by seven evil spirits (Luke 8. 2). She became one of the most devoted of Christ's disciples. The old belief that she had been a woman of bad character from which the current use of the word "magdalen" (reformed prostitute) has arisen, rests on her identification with the sinful woman who anointed the Saviour's feet (Luke 7), an identification which is completely unscriptural, and which does not seem to go back beyond the time of Gregory the Great in the sixth century. Mary Magdalen is frequently mentioned in all the Gospels in the narratives of our Lord's crucifixion and resurrection. She was "last at his Cross and earliest at his tomb".

\* \* \*

The Gospel chosen brings into the list of Eucharistic readings one of the most familiar and best-loved stories in the New Testament. In the Collect we are reminded that Mary was "called and sanctified" (i.e. set apart) by Jesus to be a witness



to his resurrection; the Epistle well expresses how Mary might have come to think of her relationship to her risen Lord.

\* \* \*

The prayer in the Collect is that we may be healed from all our infirmities as Mary was from hers, and that like her, we too may serve God, inspired and strengthened by him who lives to die no more.

## St. James the Apostle

(July 25th)

### THE COLLECT

**G**RANT, O merciful God, that as thine holy Apostle St. James, leaving his father and all that he had, without delay was obedient unto the calling of thy Son Jesus Christ, and followed him; so we, forsaking all worldly and carnal affections, may be evermore ready to follow thy holy commandments; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

### FOR THE EPISTLE

ACTS II. 27 AND  
PART OF CHAPTER 12

### *Herod kills James*

During this period some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them by the name of Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there was to be a great famine throughout the world. (This actually happened in the days of Claudius.) The disciples determined to send relief to the brothers in Judaea, each contributing as he was able. This they did, sending their contribution to the elders there personally through Barnabas and Saul.

It was at this time that King Herod laid violent hands on some of the Church members. James, John's brother, he executed

with the sword, and when he found this action pleased the Jews he went on to arrest Peter as well.

THE GOSPEL

ST. MATTHEW 20. 20

*The true greatness*

At this point the mother of the sons of Zebedee arrived with her sons and knelt in front of Jesus to ask him a favour.

"What is it you want?" he asked her.

"Please say that these two sons of mine may sit one on each side of you when you are king!" she said.

"You don't know what it is you are asking," replied Jesus.

"Can you two drink what I have to drink?"

"Yes, we can," they answered.

"Ah, you will indeed 'drink my drink'," Jesus told them, "but as for sitting on either side of me, that is not for me to grant—that belongs to those for whom my Father has planned it."

When the other ten heard of this incident they were highly indignant with the two brothers.

But Jesus called them to him and said:

"You know that the rulers of the heathen lord it over them and that their great ones have absolute power? But it must not be so among you. No, whoever among you wants to be great must become the servant of you all, and if he wants to be first among you he must be your slave—just as the Son of Man has not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life to set many others free."

---

### The Consequences of Following Jesus

The apostle here remembered is James, the brother of John—fishermen sons of Zebedee and Salome.

Many talks and discussions had prepared him for the fateful day when his call came to be a disciple—told thus in the first

Gospel: "Jesus went farther on and saw two more men, also brothers, James and John. They were aboard the boat with their father Zebedee repairing their nets, and he called them. At once they left the boat, and their father, and followed him."

\* \* \*

This is recalled in the first part of the Collect, which goes on to show that modern disciples of Jesus too have to make a choice—between God and the world. If God and his commandments are to come first, it will mean "forsaking" material things and the desires of the flesh (called "carnal affections" in the Collect), for they can never usurp the place that belongs to God alone. Try a simple test: where does divine worship come in your list of Sunday activities? First?

\* \* \*

The way of Jesus is the way of the Cross—of renunciation and self-sacrifice. The Gospel shows James (and indeed all his family) still in the throes of learning that hard lesson. Jesus reminded his disciples that there was no short cut to greatness; only those could be great who were willing to pay the price. They had to suffer with him if they would reign with him. No cross, no crown!

James won his throne; as the Epistle tells, he was the first of the Apostles to suffer martyrdom. He had "drunk the drink" of Jesus.

## The Transfiguration

(August 6th)

### THE COLLECT

**O** GOD, who before the passion of thine only-begotten Son didst reveal his glory upon the holy mount: Grant unto us thy servants, that in faith beholding the light of his countenance, we may be strengthened to bear the cross, and be



changed into his likeness from glory to glory; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

THE EPISTLE

I ST. JOHN 3. 1

*The family likeness*

Consider the incredible love that the Father has shown us in allowing us to be called “children of God”—and that is not just what we are called, but what we *are*. Our heredity on the Godward side is no mere figure of speech—which explains why the world will no more recognise us than it recognised Christ.

Oh, dear children of mine (forgive the affection of an old man!), have you realised it? Here and now we *are* God’s children. We don’t know what we shall become in the future. We only know that, if reality were to break through, we should reflect his likeness, for we should see him as he really is!

Everyone who has at heart a hope like that keeps himself pure, for he knows how pure Christ is.

THE GOSPEL

ST. MARK 9. 2

*A glimpse of the glory of Jesus*

Six days later, Jesus took Peter and James and John with him and led them high up on a hill-side where they were entirely alone. His whole appearance changed before their eyes, while his clothes became white, dazzling white—whiter than any earthly bleaching could make them. Elijah and Moses appeared to the disciples and stood there in conversation with Jesus. Peter burst out to Jesus:

“Master, it is wonderful for us to be here! Shall we put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah?”

He really did not know what to say, for they were very frightened. Then came a cloud which overshadowed them and a voice spoke out of the cloud:

“This is my dearly-loved Son. Listen to him!”

'Then, quite suddenly they looked all round them and saw nobody at all with them but Jesus.

---

### Sharing the Master's Glory

The feast of the Transfiguration was dropped by the Reformers. It has rightly been restored in modern Anglican Prayer Books (American, Canadian, Scottish and the 1928 Book). Note that "to be transfigured" means to become changed in appearance.

What precisely happened on the mountain (probably Hermon) it is impossible to say, but that it was an outstanding moment in the inner life of Jesus, unveiled so that the three disciples could have some share in it—of that there can be little doubt. They caught a glimpse of the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ, and it was an experience almost beyond the power of human language to express.

\* \* \*

The Gospel tells the story; it is in Matthew (17) and Luke (9) too with certain small additions. Peter had just made his great confession, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God", and Jesus had then foretold his own death and resurrection. Now, in the transfiguration of their Master, the three disciples had their faith in him strengthened. They caught a glimpse of his inner life as his whole appearance changed before their eyes—or, as the Collect puts it, when "his glory was revealed upon the holy mount". Somehow they recognised Moses and Elijah—representing the Law and the Prophets—whose work Christ had come to fulfil. It was a strange and frightening experience for the three friends, which is perhaps why Peter came out with the odd remark about the shelters. Then they felt the presence and heard the voice of God, confirming their own faith in the words, "This is my dearly-loved Son. Listen to him!"

\* \* \*

The Collect is a prayer that the servants of God may, through the eyes of faith, catch a glimpse of the glory of Christ ("in faith beholding the light of his countenance"), and so follow him in a life of sacrifice and service ("strengthened to bear the cross"), and grow more and more like him every day. ("From glory to glory" probably means from one stage of achievement to another.)

\* \* \*

This idea of growing into Christ is present in the Epistle. "Here and now we *are* God's children. We don't know what we shall become in the future." But it also speaks of a final "transfiguration", for "we only know that, if reality were to break through, we should reflect his likeness, for we should see him as he really is!"

Changed from glory into glory  
Till in heaven we take our place,  
Till we cast our crowns before thee,  
Lost in wonder, love and praise. (C. Wesley.)

## St. Bartholomew the Apostle

(August 24th)

### THE COLLECT

**O** ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who didst give to thine Apostle Bartholomew grace truly to believe and to preach thy Word; Grant, we beseech thee, unto thy Church, to love that Word which he believed, and both to preach and receive the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

FOR THE EPISTLE

ACTS 5. 12

### *The power of the young Church*

By common consent they all used to meet now in Solomon's Porch. But as far as the others were concerned no one dared to



associate with them, even though their general popularity was very great. Yet more and more believers in the Lord joined them, both men and women in really large numbers.

Many signs and wonders were now happening among the people through the apostles' ministry. In consequence people would bring out their sick into the streets and lay them down on stretchers or beds, so that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall upon some of them. In addition a large crowd collected from the cities round about Jerusalem, bringing with them their sick and all those who were suffering from evil spirits. And they were all cured.

THE GOSPEL

ST. LUKE 22. 24

*Serving others is true "greatness"*

And then a dispute arose among them as to who should be considered the most important.

But Jesus said to them:

"Among the heathen it is their kings who lord it over them, and their rulers are given the title of 'benefactors'. But it must not be so with you! *Your* greatest man must become like a junior and your leader must be a servant. Who is the greater, the man who sits down to dinner or the man who serves him? Obviously, the man who sits down to dinner—yet *I* am the one who is the servant among you. But you are the men who have stood by me in all that I have gone through, and as surely as my Father has given me my kingdom, so I give you the right to eat and drink at my table in that kingdom. Yes, you will sit on thrones and rule the twelve tribes of Israel!"

---

### The Church and the Gospel

Nothing is known of the Apostle Bartholomew except his name, unless he be the same person as the Nathanael whose call is described in John 1. 43-51—a view commonly, but not

universally, held. The Epistle and Gospel, therefore, are limited to two of the occasions on which Bartholomew, as one of the Twelve, must have been present.

\* \* \*

The two selections are well chosen. To take the Epistle first, the trust of the Apostles in God's power within them through the Holy Spirit was so intense and complete that their evangelistic and healing power knew no limits. Further, non-Christians ("the others") *knew* that they stood apart—the lines were too sharply drawn for them to think otherwise—and finally the Church grew with breath-taking rapidity, "both men and women" coming in "in really large numbers".

\* \* \*

If "faith which has no limits" is the subject of the Epistle, "service, not self" is the theme of the Gospel. The disciples needed the lesson, and so surely does the world of today. Jostling for position, lust for power and self-glorification—so common in contemporary society and even in the Church—finds no support in the teaching of Jesus. There is only one Christian way, "to empty self of self"; the cross before the crown!

\* \* \*

Now notice how the Epistle and Gospel light up the words of the Collect. The Church is to "love the Word which Bartholomew believed"; and what is this except to serve the Master's cause with shining faith (Epistle) and selfless devotion (Gospel)? Let this once happen and first things will become first once again; the Church will stop expending its energies in irrelevant trifles; and the saving power of the Gospel will be preached and received. The Church of today needs not more rules and more organisation, but more *committed Christians and courageous missionaries*, even if, like Bartholomew, they never "hit the headlines".

# St. Matthew the Apostle

(September 21st)

## THE COLLECT

**O** ALMIGHTY God, who by thy blessed Son didst call Matthew from the receipt of custom to be an Apostle and Evangelist; Grant us grace to forsake all covetous desires, and inordinate love of riches, and to follow the same thy Son Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

## THE EPISTLE

II CORINTHIANS 4. 1

### *Bringing light into darkness*

This is the ministry which God in his mercy has given us and nothing can daunt us. We use no hocus-pocus, no clever tricks, no dishonest manipulation of the Word of God. We speak the plain truth and so commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. If our gospel is "veiled", the veil must be in the minds of those who are spiritually dying. The spirit of this world has blinded the minds of those who do not believe, and prevents the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, the image of God, from shining on them. For it is Christ Jesus as Lord whom we preach, not ourselves; we are your servants for Jesus' sake. God, who first ordered light to shine in darkness, has flooded our hearts with his light. We now can enlighten men only because we can give them knowledge of the glory of God, as we see it in the face of Jesus Christ.

## THE GOSPEL

ST. MATTHEW 9. 9

### *Jesus calls the "sinner", Matthew*

Jesus left there and as he passed on he saw a man called Matthew sitting at his desk in the tax-collector's office.

"Follow me!" he said to him—and the man got to his feet and followed him.



Later, as Jesus was in the house sitting at the dinner-table, a good many tax-collectors and other disreputable people came on the scene and joined him and his disciples. The Pharisees noticed this and said to the disciples, "Why does your master have his meals with tax-collectors and sinners?" But Jesus heard this and replied:

"It is not the fit and flourishing who need the doctor, but those who are ill! Suppose you go away and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' In any case I did not come to invite the 'righteous' but the 'sinners'."

---

### Following Christ

Each of the first three Gospels tells of the call of Matthew Levi and the great feast which followed, but beyond being in the list of the Twelve, he is not mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament. He has, however, given his name to the first Gospel which in all probability embodies his work, and he is rightly called "Evangelist" as well as "Apostle" in the Collect.

Matthew was one of the "publicani" or tax-gatherers who contracted to collect specified sums in taxes for the Romans. (Note that "receipt of custom" in the Collect means "tax-collecting"; "custom" is a due or tax.) As the tax-collectors often "feathered their own nests" by adding a high percentage for themselves, they were hated by their fellow-Jews, who looked upon them as traitors to their country as well as dishonest money-grabbers.

Matthew was called to a new life of discipleship, and accepted the call at once though no doubt he had been thinking things out for weeks before. The incident at the feast made it clear that Jesus regarded no one as "beyond the pale"—as an absolute outsider. Matthew knew that the Lord had come to call the "sinners" and the call was clear and uncompromising: to follow Christ meant putting God and his Kingdom first.

\* \* \*

This Collect takes up this point. Like Matthew, every Christian must take his stand with Christ. Desires he will have—even covetous ones—and money he must earn and use; but they must not become the absorbing, consuming passion of his life and usurp the place of God himself.

I heard him call—  
Come, follow—that was all;  
My gold grew dim;  
My soul went after him;  
I rose and followed—that was all.  
Who would not follow if they heard his call?

\* \* \*

In the Epistle we may imagine Paul speaking not only for himself but for Matthew the Apostle and Evangelist. How well Matthew had known the power of “the spirit of this world”! It had blinded his mind to the truth and darkened his understanding, but at length “God, who first ordered light to shine in darkness, had flooded his heart with light.” Undaunted by the great choice, Matthew took the irrevocable step and became a minister of the new agreement—reconciled at last and at peace with God.

## St. Michael and All Angels

(September 29th)

### THE COLLECT

**O**VERLASTING God, who hast ordained and constituted the services of Angels and men in a wonderful order; Mercifully grant, that as thy holy Angels always do thee service in heaven, so by thy appointment they may succour and defend us on earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

*The vision of war in heaven*

Then war broke out in Heaven. Michael and his angels battled with the dragon. The dragon and his angels fought back, but they did not prevail and they were expelled from Heaven. So the huge dragon, the serpent of ancient times, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world, was hurled down upon the earth, and his angels were hurled down with him.

Then I heard a great voice in Heaven cry:

“Now the salvation and the power and kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ have come! For the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down from this place, where he stood before our God accusing them day and night. Now they have conquered him through the blood of the Lamb, and through the Word to which they bore witness. They did not cherish life even in the face of death!

“Therefore, rejoice, O Heavens, and all you who live in the Heavens! But alas for the earth and the sea, for the devil has come down to you in great fury, knowing that his time is short!”

*Jesus speaks about children*

It was at this time that the disciples came to Jesus with the question: “Who is really greatest in the kingdom of Heaven?” Jesus called a little child to his side and set him on his feet in the middle of them all. “Believe me,” he said, “unless you change your whole outlook and become like little children you will never enter the kingdom of Heaven. It is the man who can be as humble as this little child who is greatest in the kingdom of Heaven.

“Anyone who welcomes one child like this for my sake is welcoming me. But if anyone leads astray one of these little children who believe in me he would be better off thrown into



the depths of the sea with a mill-stone hung round his neck! Alas for the world with its pitfalls! In the nature of things there must be pitfalls, yet alas for the man who is responsible for them!

"If your hand or your foot is a hindrance to your faith, cut it off and throw it away. It is a good thing to go into life maimed or crippled—rather than to have both hands and feet and be thrown on to the everlasting fire. Yes, and if your eye leads you astray, tear it out and throw it away. It is a good thing to go one-eyed into life—rather than to have both your eyes and be thrown on to the fire of the rubbish-heap.

"Be careful that you never despise a single one of these little ones—for I tell you that they have angels who see my Father's face continually in Heaven."

---

## Angels and Men

Angels are "spirits in the service of God" (Heb. 1. 14). They differ in what they do—being "ordained and constituted" in a "wonderful order"; some worship him and we join in their worship ("therefore with angels and archangels . . ."); others are messenger or guardian angels. The prayer of the Collect is that God may appoint them our earthly helpers and protectors ("succour" means "help"); and we ask this knowing that the angels always serve God perfectly in Heaven.

\* \* \*

This last point is made in the Epistle. The author of Revelation, making use of an ancient myth, shows that evil, disobedience and rebellion against God can have no place in Heaven; they are found only on earth—where the war continues. When we ask in the Collect for God to appoint us guarding and helping angels, it is for some of us another way of asking for that Divine grace which we must have if we are to win the war against Satan.

\* \* \*

The Gospel was no doubt chosen because of its reference in the last verse to the child's guardian angel. But it is also fitting in that it mentions three qualities a Christian needs for his spiritual warfare. The first is a *child-like simplicity* and humility which allows God to "make the going" (first paragraph). The second is *uprightness*—which scorns to mislead and deceive others, whether these be little children, or as some think, new believers, new starters in the faith (paragraph two). The third is the sternest possible *self-discipline* and a willingness to sacrifice what is very dear for the sake of the kingdom of God (paragraph three).

## St. Luke the Evangelist

(October 18th)

### THE COLLECT

ALMIGHTY God, who calledst Luke the Physician, whose praise is in the Gospel, to be an Evangelist, and Physician of the soul; May it please thee, that, by the wholesome medicines of the doctrine delivered by him, all the diseases of our souls may be healed; through the merits of thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

II TIMOTHY 4. 5

*Luke stands by Paul*

For yourself, stand fast in all that you are doing, meeting whatever suffering this may involve. Go on steadily preaching the gospel and carry out to the full the commission that God gave you.

As for me, I feel that the last drops of my life are being poured out for God. The time for my departure has arrived. The glorious fight that God gave me I have fought, the course

that I was set I have finished, and I have kept the faith. The future for me holds the crown of righteousness which God, the true judge, will give to me in that day—and not, of course, only to me but to all those who have loved what they have seen of him.

Do your best to come to me as soon as you can. Demas, loving this present world, I fear, has left me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus is away in Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me now.

When you come, pick up Mark and bring him with you. I can certainly find a job for him here. (I had to send Tychicus off to Ephesus.) And please bring with you the cloak I left with Carpus at Troas, and the books, especially the manuscripts. Alexander the coppersmith did me a great deal of harm—the Lord will reward him for what he did—and I should be very careful of him if I were you. He has been an obstinate opponent of our teaching.

#### THE GOSPEL

ST. LUKE 10. 1

#### *Sent by the Lord*

Later on the Lord commissioned seventy other disciples and sent them off in twos as advance-parties into every town and district where he intended to go.

“There is a great harvest,” he told them, “but only a few are working in it—which means you must pray to the Lord of the harvest that he will send out more reapers.

“Now go on your way. I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Don’t carry a purse or a bag or a pair of shoes, and don’t stop to pass the time of day with anyone you meet on the road. When you go into a house, say first of all, ‘Peace be to this household!’ If there is a lover of peace there, he will accept your words of blessing, and if not, they will come back to you. Stay in the same house and eat and drink what ever they put before you—a workman deserves his wages.”



## Spiritual Health

The Collect reminds us that Luke was by profession a doctor. He was almost certainly the gentile author of the third Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. The words "whose praise is in the Gospel" are taken from II Cor. 8. 18, and while true of Luke may not originally have referred to him but to one of Paul's other helpers.

If we were to be asked to make a list of the "diseases of the soul", we should each produce something different, but some "diseases" would no doubt appear on every list—lust, cruelty, and greed, for instance. Every form of selfishness would be there. And what of the remedy suggested—the wholesome, health-bringing medicines of Luke's teaching? Should we be far wrong in supposing these to be *Repentance* and *Faith*, so beautifully illustrated in Luke's writings and so necessary for the soul if the great Physician is to work a complete cure?

\* \* \*

The Epistle contains a reference to Luke—at the time of writing, Paul's sole companion. The Gospel passage is said to have been chosen because of a tradition—surely quite improbable—that Luke himself was one of the seventy. At first sight both selections seem to have little connection with the main thought of the day. But the connection is there all the same, though beneath the surface.

\* \* \*

Both the Epistle and the Gospel describe the utter selfless devotion of the Christian disciple and evangelist. In the Epistle Paul is made to say, "The last drops of my life are being poured out for God. . . . The course that I was set I have finished, and I have kept the faith." In the Gospel the seventy are commissioned to bend themselves wholly to their task; it is to be all for Christ and nothing for self.

\* \* \*

The truth is that the real cure for the diseases of the soul

is the “expulsive power of a new affection”; the sort of repentance and faith which *really do result* “in newness of life” and a complete dedication to the doing of God’s will.

## St. Simon and St. Jude, Apostles

(October 28th)

### THE COLLECT

**O** ALMIGHTY God, who hast built thy Church upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the head corner-stone; Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their doctrine, that we may be made an holy temple acceptable unto thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

ST. JUDE I.

#### *The Church has Christ’s authority*

Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, to those who have obeyed the call, who are loved by God the Father and kept in the faith by Jesus Christ—may you ever experience more and more of mercy, peace and love!

I fully intended, dear friends, to write to you about our common salvation, but I feel compelled to make my letter to you an earnest appeal to put up a real fight for the faith which has been once and for all committed to those who belong to Christ. For there are men who have surreptitiously entered the Church but who have for a long time been heading straight for the condemnation I shall plainly give them. They have no real reverence for God, and they abuse his grace as an opportunity for immorality. They will not recognise the only master, Jesus Christ our Lord.

I want to remind you of something that you really know already: that although the Lord saved all the people from the land of Egypt, yet afterwards he brought to their downfall those

who would not trust him. And the very angels who failed in their high duties and abandoned their proper sphere have been deprived by God of both light and liberty until the judgement of the great day. Sodom and Gomorrah and the adjacent cities who, in the same way as these men today, gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion, stand in their punishment as a permanent warning of the fire of judgement. Yet these men are defiling their bodies by their filthy fantasies in just the same way; they show utter contempt for authority and make a jest of the heavenly glories.

THE GOSPEL

ST. JOHN 15. 17

*Jesus warns of the world's hatred*

"This I command you, love one another! If the world hates you, you know that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, the world would love its own. But because you do not belong to the world and I have chosen you out of it, the world will hate you. Do you remember what I said to you, 'The servant is not greater than his master'? If they have persecuted me, they will persecute you as well, but if they have followed my teaching, they will also follow yours. They will do all these things to you as my disciples because they do not know the one who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. The man who hates me, hates my Father as well. If I had not done among them things that no other man has ever done, they would not have been guilty of sin, but as it is they have seen and they have hated both me and my Father. Yet this only fulfils what is written in their Law—

They hated me without a cause.

But when the helper comes, that is, the Spirit of truth, who comes from the Father and whom I myself will send to you from the Father, he will speak plainly about me. And you yourselves will also speak plainly about me for you have been with me from the first."



## One Lord, One Faith, One Church

Simon (otherwise known as the Canaanite, and as Simon Zelotes) and Jude (otherwise called Judas not Iscariot, Lebaeus or Thaddaeus) are the only two of the Twelve still to be remembered during the course of the Christian Year. There seems no clear reason for their being remembered together on the same day, though various traditions survive. They should not be confused with our Lord's brothers Simon and Jude who were *not* among the Twelve. The Epistle of Jude, from which the selection for this Festival is made, was almost certainly the work of Jude the Lord's brother and its choice helps to keep up the confusion.

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The Collect—based upon Ephesians 2, the Epistle for St. Thomas's Day—uses Paul's illustration of the Church as a building. Its foundations are laid by the Apostles and Gospel Prophets; Jesus himself is the corner stone binding into one whole the building as it grows; and the prayer is that the Church may be one in Christ (joined together in unity of spirit) in the same way as a completed building is one great unity.

\* \* \*

The Epistle—although by the *other* Jude, the Lord's brother—is altogether suitable for today's main teaching. In the first exciting days of the Church it was not at all surprising to find among the converts some with "half-baked" ideas about the new faith, and some who saw no reason why they should not go on practising the sexual immorality and loose living associated with many heathen temples. This was why the Church leaders had "to put up a real fight for the faith which has been once and for all committed to those who belong to Christ"—a faith received and handed on in the growing Church by the Apostles and Prophets through the power of the Holy Spirit.

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The last part of the Gospel recalls how the Apostles were promised this same gift of the Spirit. "He will speak plainly

about me," said Jesus, "and you yourselves will also speak plainly about me." Power came to them at Pentecost (see the Epistle for Whitsunday).

Jesus also told the Apostles that by becoming his completely committed followers they would incur unpopularity and hatred. "Because you do not belong to the world and I have chosen you out of it, the world will hate you." This can still be true today, but if it happens to us we need not feel isolated; for we, like the first century Christians, are part of a living Church—the divine society—which guards "the faith once delivered to the saints" and inspires, strengthens and supports all its members.

## All Saints' Day

(November 1st)

### THE COLLECT

**O** ALMIGHTY God, who hast knit together thine elect in one communion and fellowship, in the mystical body of thy Son Christ our Lord; Grant us grace so to follow thy blessed Saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those unspeakable joys, which thou hast prepared for them that unfeignedly love thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

### THE EPISTLE

REVELATION 7. 2

#### *A vision of the faithful*

Then I saw another angel ascending out of the east, holding the seal of the living God. He cried out in a loud voice to the four angels who had the power to harm the earth and the sea:

"Do no harm to the earth, nor to the sea, nor to the trees until we have sealed the servants of our God upon their foreheads."

I heard the number of those who were thus sealed and it was



144,000, from every tribe of the sons of Israel. Twelve thousand were sealed from the tribe of Judah; twelve thousand from the tribe of Reuben; twelve thousand from the tribe of Gad; twelve thousand from the tribe of Asher; twelve thousand from the tribe of Naphtali; twelve thousand from the tribe of Manasseh; twelve thousand from the tribe of Simeon; twelve thousand from the tribe of Levi; twelve thousand from the tribe of Issachar; twelve thousand from the tribe of Zebulun; twelve thousand from the tribe of Joseph; and twelve thousand were sealed from the tribe of Benjamin.

When this was done I looked again, and before my eyes appeared a vast crowd beyond man's power to number. They came from every nation and tribe and people and language, and they stood before the throne of the Lamb, dressed in white robes with palm-branches in their hands. With a great voice they shouted these words:

"Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb!"

Then all the angels stood encircling the throne, the elders and the four living creatures, and prostrated themselves with heads bowed before the throne and worshipped God, saying:

"Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and strength be given to our God for timeless ages!"

THE GOSPEL

ST. MATTHEW 5. 1

*The new qualities of the kingdom*

When Jesus saw the vast crowds he went up the hill-side and after he had sat down his disciples came to him.

Then he began his teaching by saying to them:

"How happy are the humble-minded, for the kingdom of Heaven is theirs!

"How happy are those who know what sorrow means, for they will be given courage and comfort!



"Happy are those who claim nothing, for the whole earth will belong to them!

"Happy are those who are hungry and thirsty for goodness, for they will be fully satisfied!

"Happy are the merciful, for they will have mercy shown to them!

"Happy are the utterly sincere, for they will see God!

"Happy are those who make peace, for they will be known as sons of God!

"Happy are those who have suffered persecution for the cause of goodness, for the kingdom of Heaven is theirs!

"And what happiness will be yours when people blame you and ill-treat you and say all kinds of slanderous things against you for my sake! Be glad then, yes, be tremendously glad—for your reward in Heaven is magnificent. They persecuted the prophets before your time in exactly the same way."

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## One Fellowship

All Saints' Day has been observed since the ninth century. The early English name for it was "All Hallows"—that is "All Holies"—and it is from this that we get the popular name "Halloween" given to the previous day, October 31st.

On All Saints' Day are remembered not so much the *great* Saints and Martyrs of the whole Catholic Church, or of national and local Churches, but all "that multitude which no man can number" of the devoted, unknown servants of God who "have departed this life in his faith and fear".

\* \* \*

The Collect links together the living and the departed in one great fellowship, thought of as the spiritual Body of Christ—of which he is the Head. (Cf. the Creed; "I believe in the Communion of Saints".) The word "elect"—chosen ones—means all faithful baptised Christians. The prayer is for help

to follow the good example of the saints so that we also may share in the glorious future promised by God. "Unspeakable joys" means joys which cannot be described; "unfeignedly" means sincerely, without reservation.

\* \* \*

The Epistle is best understood as two picture-visions of God's faithful ones—his saints. In the first vision they are on earth and are sealed by God with his mark. This is more than a Christian identity-disc; it is a protection against all possible harm to soul or body. The number, 144,000, based on the square of twelve, is the writer's way of describing completeness. All God's faithful ones are included.

In the second vision, the redeemed—the saints triumphant—are in heaven and join in the praise and worship of God and of the Saviour who has won for them salvation.

\* \* \*

The Gospel sets out those qualities which make for Christian saintliness. Its concluding words form a further link with the thought of the Collect: "Be glad then, yes, be tremendously glad—for your reward in Heaven is magnificent."

And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long,  
Steals on the ear the distant-triumph song,  
And hearts are brave again and arms are strong.

Alleluia!

From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest coast,  
Through gates of pearl streams in the countless host,  
Singing to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost

Alleluia! (W. Walsham How.)

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